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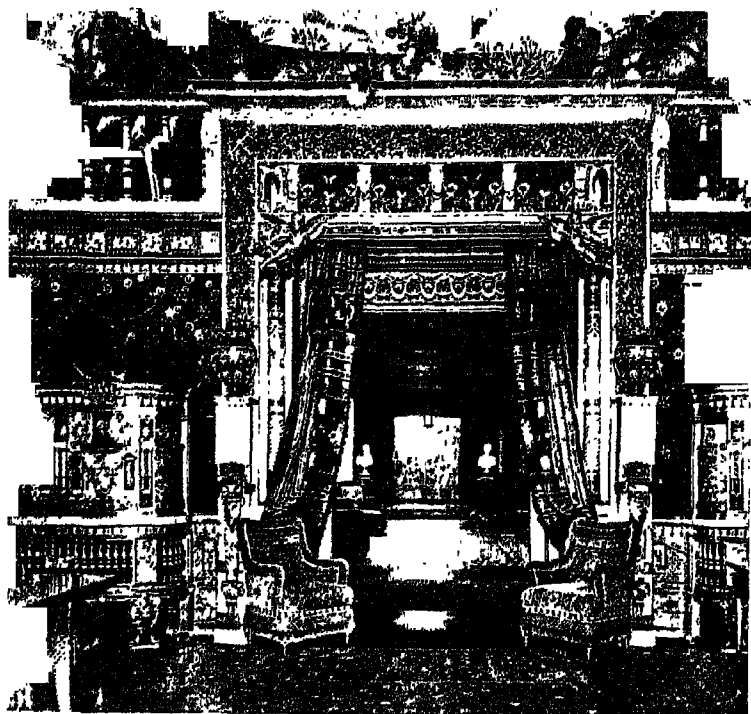
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# FAREWELL TO FIFTH AVENUE





*[Photo: Brown Bros.]*

THE INTERIOR OF A VANDERBILT MANSION IN THE EIGHTIES  
FURNISHED FOR WILLIAM H. VANDERBILT

FAREWELL  
TO FIFTH AVENUE

by

CORNELIUS VANDERBILT, JR.

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VICTOR GOLLANCZ LTD

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## CHAPTER ONE

### EDUCATION ON THE RUN

*A Newport party breaks up - Early education - J. P. Morgan on journalists - 677 Fifth Avenue - Carnegie, Mellon and Frick - "The President is downstairs" - An invitation from the White House - Grandmother Vanderbilt and the marshmallows - "Social" lessons - Saved by the Kaiser - A planned Vanderbilt life.*

#### I

A HAGGARD-FACED MAN—his name remained unknown to the Vanderbilts and their guests—shouldered his way through the rows of perfumed pirouettes and bearded buffoons and, jumping on the pink-and-blue platform in the centre of the lighted lawn, motioned to the whirling ballerinas to stop.

"I regret to announce," he said (the sound of his highly pitched voice made the leader of the orchestra spin around and drop his baton), "that President McKinley has just been assassinated in Buffalo."

The next moment he was gone, possibly to take his news further along Bellevue Avenue : what with the prevailing fashion of the moment and the approaching end of an unusually gay season, several



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masquerade parties were being given in Newport on the night of September 6, 1901.

There was silence in the audience. The French ballerinas stood still on the stage, eyeing each other in puzzlement.

“ Qu'est-ce-qu'il a dit, ce type-là ? As-tu compris ? ”

No one volunteered to interpret the ominous announcement for them but at a sign from the host, who tore off his mask and moved closer to the platform, the orchestra rose and struck up the opening bars of the National Anthem.

The party was over. So was the America of the Newport masqueraders. It may have taken them thirty-two years more to travel the route from Roosevelt, Theodore to Roosevelt, Franklin Delano and to hear themselves described as “ a few selfish men ” by an occupant of the White House but even on that faraway September night they doubted not that a whole epoch rather than its figurehead had been felled by Czolgosz in Buffalo.

Scurrying back to their homes in New York, Philadelphia and Boston, they were bidding farewell to the golden age of railroad emperors, to the bliss of coupon-clipping grey-haired children, to the reign of inherited millions, to the partnership of

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iron-headed Fifth Avenue dowagers and iron-hearted political bosses, to the spirit of certainty about to-morrow's caviare and the day-after-to-morrow's orchids.

Even on that faraway September night in 1901 they felt, those bearers of America's "greatest" names, that from then on they would have to run as fast as they could in order to remain in the same place, in order that the nightmare of the future might not become the terror of the present.

## 2

I VAGUELY REMEMBER being awakened in the middle of that night, lifted out of bed by my English nurse, dressed approximately, hustled away in a calèche and tossed aboard my father's yacht.

We were in a great hurry to get back to New York. Bankers and lawyers were there. Bankers who handled our money and lawyers who stood guard between us and the legions of people anxious to separate the Vanderbilts from their millions. The former were charging us a handsome commission, the latter were drawing a huge annual retainer. Both were supposed to possess uncanny wisdom. Both were paid for their unflagging knowledge of

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What To Do. Whenever anything sensational broke out at home or abroad, anything suggestive of war, revolution or additional taxation, we jumped aboard our yacht and returned to New York. No tragedy of the world was permitted to enter our conversation or change our routine until we found out what Messrs. Blank, Blank, Blank and Blank thought of it. So much so that years later, when the telephone rang one afternoon in our Newport house announcing the fall of the gold standard in Great Britain, I packed my pyjamas and toothbrush almost automatically and made for the Yacht Club's landing : it stood to reason that our New York lawyers would know how to keep Pennsylvania Avenue from following the pernicious example of Downing Street. Didn't they occupy two entire floors of an exclusive down-town skyscraper? Didn't they require three solid inches of vellum stationery to accommodate the engraved pageant of their resounding names? Didn't they charge six figures for composing a brief, win, lose or draw? It always seemed well worth a tiresome night's trip to behold the immaculate morning jackets and striped trousers of Messrs. Blank, Blank, Blank and Blank and to hear them say in the rich tones of their Supreme Court voices : " We confess we understand

nothing in this grossly involved situation. We are inclined to advise extreme caution and no commitments for the time being."

I must admit, however, that I learned to appreciate our venerable attorneys only much later, long after I had come of age and discovered the existence of that shaggy, bespectacled individual who is invariably to be found somewhere in a back room of resplendent legal offices in Wall Street, who cannot afford a morning jacket or a pair of striped trousers, and who knows the law.

While my childhood lasted—it lasted twenty years, from the battle of Manila to the battle of Château-Thierry—both my sister and I dreaded those sudden trips to New York and sincerely hoped that some day we would be able to stick a pin in the chair reserved for the senior partner of Messrs. Blank, Blank, Blank and Blank. As far as we two were concerned, each homecoming meant a partial separation from our parents and the renewal of that nonsensical grind known in the circle of multimillionaires as "the system of private tutoring."

Locked in behind the doors of our "ideally equipped" schoolrooms, two floors above the premises reserved for the entertainment of the grown-ups, we were taken downstairs to see our

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parents twice a day : at 9 a.m. to say "good morning," eat breakfast and bow gracefully ; for twenty minutes at 5 p.m. to be displayed to the guests gathered in the drawing-room for tea. On neither occasion were we allowed to speak until we were spoken to or beg favours. The morning procedure was merely disappointing—it seemed thoroughly incomprehensible that we couldn't stay with our parents longer—but the afternoon one amounted to a real ordeal. At the age of ten we were supposed to realise the fine distinctions existing between the various members of New York society and remember that when shaking hands with Mrs. X, whose mother was taking-in washing before her father struck gold, a well-behaved child should not converse with her in the same tones it had been taught to reserve for the bewhiskered Mr. George F. Baker or the crimson-nosed Mr. J. P. Morgan. According to the pattern approved by our mother, I was expected to smile gravely and non-committally in answer to Mrs. X's exclamation—" Oh, my, oh, my, Neil is getting to be quite a big boy, isn't he ? " but was to wax quite enthusiastic when invited by Mr. Baker to inspect the huge golden watch presented to the dean of American bankers by his loving partners and employees. I can still hear the

tick-tock of that watch : not before I had been gassed by the Germans and fired from the staff of the old New York *Herald* by Frank Munsey, did Mr. Baker concede that I could be interested in anything else in the world beside the workings of his massive chronometer. It was much easier to be sociable with Mr. Baker's friend and famous contemporary, John Pierpont Morgan. The latter actually listened to my answers to his questions.

"What's your ambition?" he asked me once, right after I had gone through the sacred ritual of admiring Mr. Baker's watch.

"I want to be a journalist," I said with the feeling to be expected from one who was editing the monthly Pine Lodge *Acorn*, published by the sophomores of the Pine Lodge School in Lakewood, New Jersey.

"That's awful," frowned Mr. Morgan. "A journalist usually winds up by either becoming a chronic drunkard or by remaining a journalist. I do not know which is worse."

That was strong talk. The strongest talk I have ever heard in the drawing-room of my parents. It cost me four weeks of my pocket money, that conversation of mine with J. P. Morgan. My father should have been the very last man on earth to

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punish anyone for wanting to become a journalist : looking through the old files of the New York *Tribune* I find the following paragraph printed in its columns on April 14, 1885—" Among Commodore Vanderbilt's great-grandsons are William H. Junior, fourteen years of age, and Cornelius Junior, eleven, each of whom, though their father is worth more than a hundred millions of dollars, has a fancy for writing. We have received several copies of a monthly magazine called *The Comet* which they publish under the firm name of Vanderbilt Brothers, Editors and Proprietors, at No. 1 West 57th Street, at the residence of their father, Mr. Cornelius Vanderbilt. They write their own matter, set it up in type and print it from a press they brought home with them a short time ago from Europe. Number four edition contains their munificent offer of ' a handsome penknife ' for the best original story in two chapters, not exceeding 250 words in a chapter. Evidently *The Comet* is a financial success, for it maintains in these times of cut-rates the high price of five cents for a column of tribune matter. The display advertisements are those of the New York Central Railroad and Messrs. Chauncy and Gwinne Brothers, the Wall Street bankers. It seems therefore evident that large capitalists and corporations

are interested in the work of Vanderbilt Brothers Editors and Proprietors, limited in age."

"Cornelius Junior, eleven years of age," referred to in the clipping, happens to be none other than my father, Brigadier General Cornelius Vanderbilt. It would appear that he had been more successful in soliciting the advertising accounts of Vanderbilt-controlled railroads and banks for *The Comet* than I was while publishing my chain of newspapers in 1923-1927. Possibly the Vanderbilts of the 1880's were more broad-minded than the Vanderbilts of the 1920's. Probably there was a slight difference between the editorial policies of *The Comet* with its offer of a handsome pen-knife for the best short story, and the political programme of my newspapers with their readiness to stick a kitchen knife in the back of any and all stand-patters. Be that as it may, the only recognition ever accorded my enterprises by my relatives was limited to the following letter received by me from my grandmother's secretary: "Mrs. Vanderbilt," it read, and I read it over and over again until I memorised it, "instructed me to write to you and ask you to discontinue mailing your disgraceful newspapers to her address. She is neither amused nor interested."



## 3

WHENEVER I PASS nowadays by number Six Seventy-Seven Fifth Avenue, I stop and look in its large, mirrored windows. It is occupied by a fashionable shoemaker at present and each time it takes me several minutes before I am able to reconstruct the picture of the old house in which we lived until 1913. There, in the left corner, where a slick-haired salesman is trying to force the huge foot of a fat, red-faced lady into a tiny silken pump, stood the favourite chair of Andrew Carnegie. There he sat each Sunday, from five to seven, accepting the flattery of the grown-ups and never failing to repeat to the children that the most difficult art on earth is that of holding on to money.

“ Even a fool can make a million dollars, my boy, but it takes a sage to keep it. Do you hear me, Neil ? ”

“ Yes, sir, I do.”

I was not fully eight when he told it to me for the first time.

Then there were Mellon and Frick, the Two Wise Men of Pittsburgh. They usually leaned against the wall, right where the boxes with suède shoes are being kept now. Mellon spoke little if at all. I felt

a great pity for him because he never ate anything and looked at the trays of *pâtisseries* and sandwiches with those suffering, ascetic, wounded gazelle-like eyes of his which were to become a feature of American fiscal policies years later.

Frick was noisy and boisterous. He talked enough to make up for the silence of his Pittsburgh friend and partner. He promised to give me a job in a steel plant if I grew up to be a "good boy." No other guest in our house mentioned the word "dollar" so often.

According to my grandfather, Richard T. Wilson, Frick was "not a man to be permitted in the same room with children." But then my grandfather Wilson had little respect for most of the financiers gathered in the large drawing-room of number Six Seventy-Seven. A proud Georgian and a descendant of a family that was engaged in the cotton business and banking long before anyone suspected that there would ever be a city in the United States called Pittsburgh or that the humble family of van der Bilts, farmers and ferrymen, would blossom into the glittering clan of Vanderbilts, railroad magnates and socialites, my grandfather Wilson moved around the house distractedly and disconsolately, the lonely figure of a last Mohican of the South that

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was the South. Thanks to him I made the acquaintance of candy and ice cream, something which I was seldom allowed to eat at our own home or in the depressing, gloomy splendour of our grandmother Vanderbilt's mansion. Each Sunday around six, when sister and I would conclude our bowing before the many M's in the drawing-room—the Morgans, the Millses, the Mitchells, the Mellons—he would motion to our governess and then the fun, the real fun of our childhood, would begin. Tiptoeing through the “petits salons” and the reception hall, we would sneak out by the back door and rush down the Avenue toward Huyler's at Forty-third Street. Huyler's was the place which advertised “fresh candy every half an hour.” And Huyler's was the place in front of which we would stand, our grandfather watch in hand, waiting impatiently for the bell of the elevator which would rise to the level of the sidewalk from nowhere, bringing its wealth of fresh candy, thirty minutes old.

Not much love was lost between grandfather Wilson and grandmother Vanderbilt. Symbolising as they did the two poles of national life—American Dream and American Acquisitiveness—they were responsible for the mixture of idealism and shrewdness in the character of their grandchildren,

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a mixture so typically American, so frequent in the case of the vast majority of Americans of wealth.

Still less love was lost between my grandmother and myself. When she died in the spring of 1934, she left me in her will a family photograph. . . .

### 4

ONCE IN a while I heard salvos of rapturous laughter sounding downstairs and looking through the window of my room I saw a cordon of policemen thrown in front of our house and keeping back a crowd of onlookers. This signified the visit of T. R. No other man ever laughed that laughter. No other man attracted such crowds.

"The President is downstairs. You will shake hands with him but you are not to annoy him with your silly questions."

Mother never failed to issue that warning. Mother never saw it work. Whatever it was in the personality of that man which exerted such appeal to children—his friendly roughness, his thrilling stories or the seriousness with which he answered our queries—no dire threat of punishment could have kept my sister or me from sticking to his chair with

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wide-open mouths and asking him one thousand and one superbly foolish questions.

Could the President kill any man he wished to ?

Were there many wild animals in the White House ?

Did he ever wear an Admiral's uniform ?

Did he ride horseback from the Pennsylvania Station to our house ?

Was a boy supposed to take his parent's orders even after he had become President ?

Did they let children eat ice cream in the White House ?

And so on, *ad infinitum*, until he raised his hand and said :

" Now I will do the talking and you will do the listening."

We listened to him as one would to a Caruso. Holding our breaths, clenching our fists, frightened lest we miss a gesture or a smile.

Our dream was . . . We never dared to tell him what it was but he guessed it. One morning—the great event took place in the early summer of 1908 which was the last summer spent by T. R. in the White House—a long envelope marked Official arrived at our house. It was addressed to Miss Grace Vanderbilt and Master Cornelius Vanderbilt

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Jr. The President of the United States and Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt was requesting the pleasure of their company at luncheon in the White House.

The letter opened and read, we were summoned to father's study. He was pacing the floor in a rage.

"Positive disgrace. . . . I cannot entertain the President any more because of my children. . . . Behaving like street urchins. . . . Annoying Mr. Roosevelt and making him waste his precious time. . . . I shall get him on the phone immediately and apologise for your shameless tactics. . . ."

In vain did we try to explain that the invitation to the White House came unsolicited and that no undue pressure had been brought by us on T. R. Father lifted the receiver and for the next few minutes our hearts were beating to the furious measure of hope intermingled with despair. Mr. Roosevelt must have stated his attitude in forceful terms because we suddenly saw a different expression come into father's eyes.

"Really? . . . Well, of course, I would be only too happy to let them go. . . . I was merely trying to safeguard you against this disturbance. . . ."

And so it came to pass that at the stroke of noon on the following Saturday, Master Cornelius Vanderbilt Jr. sat in the Lincoln Study of the White

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House, across the desk from the President of the United States.

"We men," decided T. R., "will have our food served here. We have important matters to discuss. . . ."

"We men" referred solely to himself and his diminutive guest. All other men, including Mr. Taft (then Secretary of War) and the young Roosevelts, were to eat their luncheon in the dining-room, in the company of the "women" (my sister among them).

It was a meal and a lesson in Lincolniana combined. Accentuating his words by an occasional tap on the desk with his fork, the President spoke, earnestly and eloquently, of "that strange figure from the plains of Illinois who spent many a sleepless night in this study, standing in front of that window on the right and staring into space, over the leafless trees below and over the dark expanse of the Potomac beyond. . . ."

Most of what he said was way over the mental height of his listener. When I returned to New York and tried to repeat his speech for the benefit of my tutors, I stuttered and stammered. I missed most of T. R.'s words and there was no way of reproducing that which I shall never forget: the passionate

quality of his voice, the fiery pantomime of his odd, expressive face and the sad, whimsical smile with which he described his tragic predecessor as "that strange figure from the plains of Illinois."

I must have read several scores of books on Lincoln since that summer afternoon of 1908 and I have sat with five other Presidents in the Lincoln Study of the White House but no book caused such turmoil in my soul as that thirty minute speech of T. R. and no other President evoked the spirit of Lincoln with such sharpness. To solid, rotund Taft the atmosphere of his surroundings was just history, "glorious history of the founder of the Republican Party." For scholarly Wilson, bedridden and heart-broken, it provided the text of a brilliant lecture on "the sources of American idealism," delivered by him from his wheel-chair, in the weak but bitter tones of a prophet interested in the past only in so far as it illustrates his own righteousness. To Harding, handsome, jovial and self-contented, the whole Lincoln epic meant nothing. When asked at the end of a lengthy conversation—he wanted me to become Assistant Secretary of War in his Cabinet—how it felt to sit in Lincoln's chair, he said with a frown: "Yes, he did sit in this chair, didn't he?" Of the remaining two men who received me in the Lincoln



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Study, one—Calvin Coolidge—merely admitted that “it would put a heavy load on anyone’s shoulders to breathe the air of this room,” the other—the present occupant of the White House—was prevented from discussing the subject by his natural reluctance to evoke too obvious comparisons. No one who knows Franklin Delano Roosevelt needs to ask him what he thinks of his present surroundings. No one who beheld the miracle of 1933 can doubt that many a night last March there stood a tall, broad-shouldered figure in front of the large window of the Lincoln Study in the White House, staring into space, “over the leafless trees below and over the dark expanse of the Potomac beyond. . . .”

## 5

KIDNAPPERS and “commoners” were the two major threats of my childhood. The former wanted money, lots of it. I confronted them first at the tender age of six months when my nurse lost me—perambulator and all—in the Avenue des Champs Élysées, Paris.

The latter, though not nearly so formidable, caused still more worry to my parents. It was

simple enough to hire a retinue of bodyguards and order them to follow me wherever I went, but it required no end of strategy to prevent my talking to the "awful street boys" and inviting them to come and skate in back of number Six Seventy-Seven. There was no accounting for what those boys could have taught me! For one thing, they could have told me that my great-great-grandfather and founder of the Vanderbilt fortune ferried vegetables from Staten Island to Battery Place. For another, they could have instilled in me ideas of my own grandeur. Under no circumstances was I to learn about our "common" origin or realise what the terms "wealth," "poverty," "million dollars" stood for. The job was intricate but the execution masterful. Until the age of twelve I sincerely believed that everybody had a house in Fifth Avenue, a villa in Newport and a steam-driven, ocean-going yacht. Until the age of fifteen I was allowed only twenty-five cents a week for my pocket-money. Until the age of seventeen I was never permitted to go out unescorted.

Once—it happened in my second and last year at St. Paul's preparatory school in Concord, New Hampshire—several of my classmates asked me to treat them to some candy.

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"How could I?" I said. "I have only twelve cents left of my weekly allowance."

"That's all right," they answered, "just walk in the store and tell them who you are. They'll let you charge anything you want."

"Will they?"

"Sure thing. You are a Vanderbilt."

A Vanderbilt? I felt puzzled. My name was Vanderbilt all right but I saw no reason why the store proprietor should be impressed by it.

The boys sneered.

"Oh, go on, stop pretending. Don't you know that your family has one hundred million bucks?"

"I see," I said. I did not. "One hundred million bucks" meant nothing to me. The only thing I really saw was a mean look in my classmates' eyes. I sighed and entered the store where I explained to the proprietor that I would buy one pound of marshmallows, provided he would agree to take twelve cents now and wait for the balance until Saturday. The man behind the counter hesitated. He looked for a moment at the shining dime and two sticky pennies in my trembling hand, then asked :

"What's the name?"

"Vanderbilt."

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"What's the first name?"

"Cornelius. Cornelius Vanderbilt."

"Any relation to the old lady who has that fine house in Fifty-seventh Street, in New York?"

"That's my grandmother."

"Take two pounds of marshmallows," said the proprietor, "and keep your twelve cents. You'll pay me the whole thing in a heap at your pleasure."

I walked out in a daze.

"You see," said my torturers, "you can buy the whole town if you want to. Just give your name and tell them to charge. How about your buying bicycles for us?"

"But I have only . . ."

I followed them across the street into a hardware shop. Five minutes later I saw them ride away atop their brand new bikes. Three days later I beheld the stern face of my father. He came post-haste to investigate my activities. I was given a sound thrashing, taken back to New York that very night and my weekly allowance reduced to fifteen cents until such a time as the debts incurred by me in and around Concord, New Hampshire, had been paid in full.

SHOULD the former Governor of New York be seated on the right of the hostess and the former Ambassador of Great Britain on her left or vice versa ? ”

My mother, not Emily Post, was speaking. My sister and I, age fourteen and twelve, were to guess the answer, this being our daily lesson in social “savoir faire,” conducted around the tray filled with the place-cards of the guests expected for dinner.

No other lesson caused us that much trouble. Even to-day I cannot glance at a list of “those present ” at this or that Manhattan party, without asking myself in a terrified voice : “ Wonder what they did with that former U.S. Senator ? Did they plant him below the Assistant Secretary of Agriculture or above ? Gosh, this must have been tough on the children in the house.”

I know that there is an almost infinitely large number of tougher things, but it *was* tough, excruciatingly so, on the two particular children who resided in the Fifth Avenue mansion now occupied by a shoe-maker. Years before I had learned the Constitution of the United States, I knew that a Secretary of War should never, never be out-seated

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by a Secretary of Labour, that both should be shovelled down toward the middle of the table in order to vacate a spot for a Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and that no Chairman of a New York bank, no matter how many millions in back-taxes he owed the U.S. Government, could be placed on the right of the hostess if a Congressman, no matter how small a chance for re-election he stood, were invited to break our bread.

Many a time my sister and I were left without dessert for our failure to distinguish between a full-fledged Ambassador and a Minister Plenipotentiary and many a time we swore that when we grew up we would make all those frightfully important people eat in the kitchen and like it.

And yet, as much as we loathed our winters because of those daily "social" lessons, we would gladly have stayed in New York through the sticky, stuffy heat of a Manhattan summer rather than be aboard our yacht at Kiel or at Cowes. Foreign dignitaries were there, all kinds and sorts of dignitaries. The moment the *North Star* would drop anchor in close proximity to the Kaiser's *Hohenzollern*, to the Czar's *Standard* or King Edward's *Victoria and Albert*, we would be called in to mother's cabin and given a lengthy lecture on how to behave

in the presence of royalty. Somewhere in one of my old trunks I still have that hateful coat with ermine trimmings into which I was forced each time this or that Imperial Majesty was expected to luncheon or dinner. So long and cumbersome was that fantastic thing that had it not been for the resourcefulness of the Kaiser I would be resting now at the bottom of the Baltic. It happened aboard H.I.M.S. *Hohenzollern*. Stepping back on the promenade deck to click my heels before our Imperial host in the fashion to which he was accustomed by generations of Prussian naval cadets, I got entangled in the thick ermine border of my resplendent harness, lost my balance and nearly fell overboard. What followed remained a blank in my memory. When I came to on a bunk in the *Hohenzollern's* hospital, the first thing I saw was the moustache of the Kaiser.

"It feels good to be alive, doesn't it?" he said, beaming at me benevolently.

It felt rotten.

"You ought to be grateful to me, young man," continued the Kaiser. "It's a lucky thing for you that I never lose my head."

It was a lucky thing for me. I was grateful to His Majesty. And I said so. On two different occasions. Then aboard the *Hohenzollern*. And fifteen years

later when I tried to interview him in his exile in Doorn. In 1912 he waved my thanks aside with the air of a man who had saved more than one boy in his lifetime. In 1927 he admitted his profound regrets.

"Had I let you sink that day at Kiel," he said, "you would not be intruding upon my privacy now."

## 7

BY THE TIME I was sixteen I had lunched and dined with every major crowned head of Europe and the sum of my scholastic knowledge compared most unfavourably with that of a boy of fourteen about to enter the freshman class in high school. It could not have been otherwise. Tossed among New York, Virginia and Florida in winter, I commuted between Newport and Europe in summer and had to rely upon private tutors chosen for their dignified appearance to atone for the lack of regular education. I spoke French, some German and Italian. I swam, fenced, boxed and sailed boats. I shot quail and danced with my tall English governesses, five times my age. But that was all. The rest consisted of disjointed bits and pieces of information communicated to me aboard trains, ships and motor-cars by persons who themselves would never have



passed the high school examination. I likewise went to many summer schools in Europe, perhaps to too many schools for my own good : in England, when my parents expected to enter their yacht in the Cowes Regatta ; in Germany, when they accepted the Kaiser's invitation to join the *Hohenzollern* on a cruise through the Scandinavian fjords ; in Spain, when the *North Star* was to visit San Sebastian. The choice of my summer schools depended entirely on the itinerary of our yacht. I even spent two days in the Academy for boys of " aristocratic birth " in Tsarskoe-Selo. I could not speak Russian nor understand my teachers there but it so happened that the reunion of the fashionable yachtsmen of the world was held that year off the coast of Russia.

The net result of this unique learn-while-you-travel system was that while still identified as " that funny Yankee " by my classmates in England I was nicknamed " that limey boy " in Concord, New Hampshire.

My parents said that they had planned my life for years to come. First, I was going to a college, a " very good " college. Next, I was to be given a minor job in a banking firm. And finally, I was to marry, preferably in 1919, when numerous highly eligible girls were to make their *début*. All of this

could easily have taken place : our morning mail never lacked its quota of begging letters from Prexies in search of funds for the good old Alma Mater, my father sat on the Board of a great many banks, and a marriage to a Vanderbilt was considered, at worst, an excellent stepping-stone for a society girl. There was just one flaw in this programme : it had been agreed upon by my parents in the month of July of the year Nineteen Fourteen, in the last week of the Old World.

I remember that month and I won't forget that week. Invited by King George V to witness the Great Naval Review at Spithead, we followed H.M.S. *Victoria and Albert* to the appointed place, not suspecting that we were to see what turned out to be England's demonstration of preparedness and England's challenge to Germany.

For three solid hours they steamed by, those steel-grey giants, glittering in the red rays of a July morning sun. As they passed the *Victoria and Albert*, they dropped their colours and down went the Royal Standard, acknowledging the salute of the Empire's watchdogs. When the last colossus had passed by, up went the signal on the *Victoria and Albert* : " His Majesty thanks His Fleet and expresses His appreciation to Officers and men." There was the mighty

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roar of the hundred-and-one-gun salute, the sounds of martial music, and then the endless steel-grey serpent turned toward the open sea, enveloping the pale-blue horizon in a thick cloud of rising smoke.

“And now back to Southampton, to get ready for the Royal Regatta in August,” said father.

We did go back to Southampton and we did get ready : to surrender the *North Star* to the British Admiralty as a ship singularly well equipped to be used as a Naval Hospital.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITTLE BOY BLUE BLOWS HIS HORN

*The War comes to Cedarhurst, L.I. - A letter from an ex-colonel - I avenge Uncle Alfred - Spartansburg - A case of too much dough - Assisting George Washington Lincoln - Saved by a Rolls-Royce - Brief conversation with Haig - Pat O'Connor, American - Shell-shocked - "Where are your medals, Neil?" A last talk with T. R. - Funeral procession.*

#### I

THE WALL was twelve feet high and five feet thick. Of solid limestone and shrouded in ivy, it segregated the estate from Cedarhurst, Long Island, and the World of 1917. It admitted sounds—all spring long I listened to the heavy stamping of marching feet—but it shut off everything else.

The war was six weeks old. Standing on the terrace after dusk I could make out the dim lights of the training camp at Mineola.

The papers called for volunteers and warned the City of New York that if it was to retain its standing with the nation it must provide at least ten thousand more soldiers by June first. No papers were allowed

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in the house for fear that they might excite the children—the boy, aged eighteen, and the girl, aged seventeen—but a last night's edition of a pink journal was found by me each morning in the butler's pantry, at the bottom of the ice-box where it was hidden by the cook. The latter did not share Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt's misgivings. Not that my mother objected to the war. She welcomed it. Pro-English by choice and through blood ties with a score of titled Britishers, killed in action, she remembered her late friend King Edward VII and she never forgot the *Lusitania*. Her brother-in-law Alfred Vanderbilt went down on that ship, unsung by William Jennings Bryan and unavenged by Woodrow Wilson. She severed relations with Germany long before the Congress did and the general tenor of the conversation at her dinner table suggested that there was no such thing as American Neutrality. When a Morgan partner seated on the right of the hostess lowered his voice and said beamingly—"I understand that Rumania has finally come to her senses"—everybody cheered and drank the health of Rumania. It was as if the whole future of the United States depended on the willingness of Queen Marie's beloved subjects to help the French win the battle of Verdun. Fifth Avenue and Wall Street

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alike, they all resented the President's "procrastination." Steel magnates because they sold ammunition to the French. Bankers because they floated the Allied loans. Dowagers because once upon a time they had curtsied in front of Their Britannic Majesties.

Not unlike Thomas W. Lamont, Henry W. Davison, George F. Baker and other financiers who preached the New Crusade at our dinner table, my mother believed implicitly that it was not only a duty but an "honour" and a "privilege" for every able-bodied American to fight for what Mr. Lamont used to describe as "civilisation" against what was known in and around Cedarhurst as "the army of barbarous invaders." All of this was very admirable and my mother would have gladly travelled the full route with Mr. Lamont had it not been for one slight difficulty. This arose at the point when the definition "able-bodied American" threatened to include her own son within its flexible borders. She did let her husband join his Regiment of the National Guard right after the declaration of the war and just at the moment when, thanks to the allied orders, business was looking up, but to permit her only boy, who until then had never left the house unescorted, to risk his life and mingle with all sorts of strangers. . . .

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"Folly, utter folly," said my mother.

"But look at Allan Harriman," I pleaded. "Look at Tommy Hitchcock. Look at every other friend of mine. They all volunteered with the Allies long before we entered the war."

This was the wrong argument. She knew of no reason why a Vanderbilt should look at Harrimans and Hitchcocks.

"One service star in my window is quite enough," she decided. "You must complete your education first. Why, T. R. himself would never approve of your missing the chance to go to Yale this fall."

"Suppose I write T. R. a letter?"

"By all means. He will put an end to this continuous foolishness."

Several months later—I was in the Army by that time—the answer arrived from Oyster Bay. I reproduce it exactly :

"Dear Neily,

"Your dear mother, of whom as you know I am very fond and whom I greatly respect, and I do not agree about you ; and if she is willing she is to send you this letter.

"I am *very* proud of you ; I sympathise absolutely with the course you are taking ; I feel

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that you are doing exactly what, if you were my son, I would wish you to do.

“ I advise you to stay where you are, perfect yourself in your work, and get abroad with your division, into the fighting line, as soon as you can. I am exceedingly glad that you do not wish to go to Washington to join the slicker-and-slacker brigade. I do not care a rap whether a man is an enlisted man or a Major-General ; so long as he does his duty, and gets into this war, I'll take off my hat as quickly to one as to the other. If I had my way, every man would have to serve a year in the ranks before being permitted to try for a commission.

“ Of course, study steadily, at every chance, so as to fit yourself to try for a commission when the time comes. But if I had the command of a division, I'd take you with me far quicker than I would any man, no matter how well educated, who had not done as you have done. I regard you as showing the true American spirit ; the spirit of a man. I am proud to greet you as

“ Your comrade,

“ an old ex-colonel,

“ THEODORE ROOSEVELT.”



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"Which goes to prove," sighed my mother, "that even a man of Theodore Roosevelt's genius can be wrong once in a while."

A husky bodyguard was told to watch me day and night, and on the occasion of my nineteenth birthday I was given a motor-car with instructions to drive around the estate and get foolish notions out of my head.

It was the end of May. Pershing had already sailed on the *Baltic* ("It is a shame," said the grave orators at our table, "that the President dares to ignore the nation's faith in Leonard Wood. But then, what can you expect from a Princeton professor?") and the sound of marching feet awakened us at day-break, but it still looked as if the City of New York might forfeit its standing with the nation. "Uncle Sam is watching the young manhood of this great metropolis. . . . Is he to be disappointed? Just twenty-four hours left . . ." I read with a heavy heart, crouching in the corner of the butler's pantry on the morning of May 31, 1917.

I could not sleep that night. I felt convinced that the cartoonist of the pink journal had me and only me in mind when he drew that revolting figure of a weak-kneed coward hiding behind the shutters of a brown stone house. Whom else could he have had in

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mind ? Everyone else had already joined the colours. The Harrimans, the Hitchcocks, the Thaws, the Princes. . . . I was the only one left. It was I who was keeping the City of New York from filling its quota. It was I who was going to cause the City of New York the humiliation of seeing its name struck off the national roll of honour.

I jumped up and rushed toward the windows. The fires of the training camp at Mineola burned scornfully in the raw spring air. The search-lights of the Military Airdrome were flashing over the dark expanse of the silent Island, looking no doubt, for New York's only slacker ; knowing, no doubt, that they would find him behind the limestone wall of the Vanderbilt estate at Cedarhurst.

"What am I to do ? What am I to do ?" I muttered.

There was a tree right in front of the window. There was my car in the open garage on the left. There were the keys to the gates suspended from the wall on a long chain.

I listened for an instant to the stillness of the house, then put on my tennis shoes, gave a frightened glance to mother's photograph on the dressing-table and dashed for the window. There was no other way to save the fair name of the City of New

York. There was no other way to avenge the Starving Belgians and my uncle Alfred.

## 2

SIX WEEKS later a gaunt, sunburned youngster drove a pair of army mules over the bumpy dirt-roads of South Carolina, gathering what his top-sergeant called "the U.S. Cavalry's contribution to the cause of Democracy." His furrowed forehead and firmly set chin indicated that he was thinking. He was trying hard to understand why the approaches to Spartansburg, South Carolina, had to be scrubbed and sprinkled with sand before the Kaiser could be dragged out of the Imperial Palace in Potsdam. He suspected that aside from the Sam Browne belt he had nothing in common with that spick-and-span hero who stood in the window of Brentano's, holding a beautiful woman of Alsace in his strong arms. But war was war, orders were orders, mothers were mothers. One came to the 96th Street Armoury in New York at daybreak, torn white trousers, tennis shoes, *et al.*, short of breath but willing to die for America. One was handed a khaki outfit and a wide campaign hat. One marched down Fifth Avenue, accompanied by a crowd of reporters, rang the bell of the ancestral

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mansion and said patronisingly to the woman who paced the floor in the drawing-room : " Now, now, my dear, I won't have you carry on in this manner. . . ." One posed for cameramen, shook hands and distributed autographs. One studied the map of France, pensively and knowingly. And then one's mother put through a series of frantic long distance calls to the White House and the War Department and had the resplendent private of the 102nd Ammunition Train transferred from a ship ready to raise anchor to a Carolina-bound train packed with men, mules and horses. War was like that.

In the words of Mr. Newton D. Baker : " A private, whatever his name might be, should be thoroughly trained first and shipped to France only afterwards."

In the words of my top-sergeant : " A plain case of too much dough."

Too much dough !

The verdict was swift and not to be lived down. It mattered not that my parents would send me only five dollars per week during my eight months in Spartansburg. In fact, it made my situation much worse.

" How about taking the boys to a swell joint and treating them to a case of Frog champagne ? "

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" I wish I could do that."

" But what ? "

" I've explained it to you several times."

" Can't you sign a cheque ? "

" I have no bank account."

" Charge it then."

" I tried it once in school and I'll never do it again. My parents would simply refuse to pay the bill."

" So, that's what we get for wasting our time with a blankety-blank millionaire."

They would spit resoundingly and walk away in disgust. " They " were some four thousand men in the Spartansburg Camp and this dialogue took place each and every Saturday.

" What the hell is the matter with you rich guys?" Charlie, a red-faced Irishman who slept in the same tent with me asked one day. " You know damn well you're as popular around here as ground glass in coffee and still you won't budge an inch."

I swallowed hard and dropped my eyes.

" Now, look," he continued, pointing toward the other four beds in the tent. " There's six of us here. Dave worked in a tailor's shop, Mike was a garage mechanic, Jim tended the bar, Al dug sewers, I used to be a motor-cycle cop. None of us was a

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big shot, none ever had any dough, but do we lie about our folks, do we cringe when it comes to buying drinks? Not on your life. Why, I'd rather jump in the river and say 'here goes nothing' than refuse the boys a drink. Am I right, boys?"

"Right, Charlie," chorused the boys.

"So far so good, my friends. Now, then, what is the name of the guy in this here tent that has more dough than Uncle Sam's Treasury?"

"Vanderbilt!" roared the boys.

"Right again. One question more and we'll be through. What is the name of the guy in this here tent that never bought a drink for his pals?"

Once more I heard my name hurled at me, preceded and accompanied by a bevy of choice epithets.

"You are wrong," I said meekly. "I am always willing to buy a drink for you five, provided you would take something not too expensive. . . ."

That was as far as I got in my explanation.

"The General's pet. . . ."

In all my distress I had to smile at the accusation. A game of pinochle played now and then with General O'Ryan's orderly, a towering Alabama negro named George Washington Lincoln, or something like that, was the nearest I ever came to being

our Commander's pet. It so happened that Mr. Lincoln liked the smell of Yardley's Lavender Toilette Water and the beginning of our beautiful friendship dated back to the time, when passing by a Spartansburg drug store one Saturday afternoon, I saw him gaping with admiration at a pyramid of crystal bottles. Had it not been for him and his weakness for sweet odours, I would have gone through the entire war seated behind a pair of bad-tempered mules. At best, as a token of appreciation of my untiring services to the Cause of Democracy I would have been given one more mule. Two hundred and forty-five pounds of fate—reeking of gin, perfume and onions—willed otherwise. It summoned me into its presence the night before we were to start for New York and France.

"I hear you ain't goin' with us," said Mr. George Washington Lincoln, spitting on his highly polished boots which rested on the General's table.

"What do you mean, George? You surely must be mistaken."

"Not me, man. See them lists in this here drawer?"

He pointed with his right foot at a stack of papers in the open drawer of the General's table.

"Well?"

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"Your name ain't there."

"But why?"

"Your maw talked to the boss on the phone this morning."

"And?"

"That's all."

He re-arranged his feet and curled his thick, brownish lips in a knowing smile.

"But what did the General say?"

"Told her to keep her shirt on. Said he never wanted Vanderbilt blood on his hands anyhow."

This free version of the General's talk with my mother had a true ring to it. I visualised my mules and the state the Spartansburg roads would be in the day after the Regiment left. My heart sank.

"Can't you do something about it, George?"

"What do you want me to do? Monkey with the boss's papers?"

I talked some more. I begged. I hinted that I might consider splitting my weekly allowance with Mr. Lincoln.

"What else?" he asked, gruffly but not indifferently.

I replied that I thought I could get hold of a big bottle of Toilette Water.



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"Them's small pickin's," said Mr. Lincoln.  
"What I craves is an assistant."

"An assistant?"

"Yep. An assistant. To polish the General's boots, to press his pants, to clean his medals, to cook his ham-and-eggs. . . . See?"

I did.

Not before the U.S. Transport *Great Northern* was way beyond Sandy Hook did General O'Ryan discover that his coloured orderly had a Nordic assistant sleeping in the quarters reserved for stewards. He discovered it by accident. One morning his aide called his attention to the fact that a hole the size of a memorial medal was burned in the seat of His Excellency's pale khaki breeches. Mr. Lincoln, called on the carpet, blamed it all on "that young Vanderbilt feller." The rest of the crossing was spent by me in learning the fine art of pressing on the breeches of the petty officers. "Courage," said General O'Ryan, "it takes time for a man to be promoted. Before this war is over, you might be pressing the pants of the Commander-in-Chief."

3

MY FAME as pants-presser must have preceded me in France, for immediately after landing in Brest I was drafted by the Commander of the local American Military Jail to work as his orderly, chauffeur and general entertainer. A dyspeptic middle-aged man, my new chief had a grudge against all rich people in general and the Vanderbilts in particular.

"So, the public be damned, eh?" was his first greeting.

I blinked and stared.

"Don't you know who said that?"

"No, sir, I do not."

"Ever heard of William H. Vanderbilt?"

"Yes, sir, that's the name of my late great-grandfather."

"Great-grandfather to you but a blankety-blank to me. Did you bring me the money my folks dropped in the market because of him and his God damn' schemes?"

"Don't you think it would be better, sir," I volunteered after a silence, "if you ordered my transfer to the 27th Division Headquarters Troop?"

"I'd gladly transfer you to hell but I was told

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to keep you here. You can bet your life though that it won't be soft for you."

It was not. Whenever my chief had company—he had company almost every night—he called me in and said to his guests :

"Take a good look at this specimen. He might be God Almighty back home but he is just another lousy orderly here. It ain't such a bad war, my friends, when one can have a Vanderbilt scrub his lavatory."

This went on for two weeks. I slept with clenched fists but in the presence of my chief I never registered a shade of resentment. Nothing would have pleased him more than to be able to advise General Pershing's Headquarters in Chaumont that he had had to throw me in jail for a breach of discipline. At best I would have been shipped back to America, to my mules in Spartansburg.

The chance for escape came when least expected. Summoned to appear at G.H.Q. of the 2nd Army Corps, my torturer made me drive him all the way to La Rue and wait for him there. The journey was uneventful, if marked by a great deal of plain talk about my family's past, present and future. But scarcely had I deposited my venomous charge at the General's door than a British officer appeared on

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the threshold and asked, addressing the crowd of waiting chauffeurs :

“ Is there anyone among you men who knows how to drive a Rolls-Royce ? ”

I raised my hand. I was the only one to do so, which was not surprising, the intricate mechanism of that particular car being practically unknown to the majority of American drivers in 1918.

“ You are rather young,” hesitated the officer. “ Are you sure you can handle it ? ”

I nodded but preferred to omit the fact that no other make of car had ever been used by my parents.

“ Come with me.”

He led me to a long, black car flying the Union Jack on its hood and ordered me to drive him “ for a few miles.” The demonstration over, he smiled approvingly.

“ You will do,” he said. “ You are to drive General Haig back to the British Headquarters. His chauffeur has been stricken ill. Ate too much, I daresay.”

No other questions were asked by him. No explanations volunteered by me. In one leap I jumped from the kitchen of the American Military Jail in Brest on to the box of the car of the Commander-in-Chief of the British Armies. When I

brought Haig to his Headquarters that night, he said laconically :

“ Give your name to my aide. I shall ask the American Command to transfer you here.”

Only on two other occasions did I hear his voice. Once when I was driving him along the British Front and was itching to ask him whether he believed that we were facing another winter of fighting, he suddenly touched my shoulder and remarked in a monotone :

“ I say, American, how long do you think this bally war will last ? ”

The second time, when my wish to be transferred to the Headquarters Troop was finally granted by the powers-that-be, he handed me his visiting card and added : “ If ever in need of a job after the war, come to this address in London.”

My name meant nothing to him. I often think I should have accepted his kind offer.

4

THERE were four of us rushing the Division dispatches over what was left of the roads in the Somme Sector : Pat O'Connor, a weather-beaten Sunbeam, a broken-down motor-cycle and I. The

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dispatchers always worked in teams, not from lonesomeness but to assure the delivery of orders in case one of the two men met with an accident or a German bullet.

Pat hailed from Brooklyn. He was a fireman by profession, a motor-cycle racer by vocation and a Tammany man by faith. He despised automobiles and let me puff behind in my Lizzie while he himself thundered ahead astride his fire-breathing mount.

Very often, pursued by a Fokker or spotted by sharp-eyed Bavarian snipers, we would stop in the middle of the road, run into the field, dig-in and lie in the mud for hours, hours of boredom for Pat, hours of high learning for me. This hard-drinking, fast-talking Brooklyn fireman was my first real acquaintance with America and Americans. He knew more about practical politics than William Jennings Bryan, more about the value of cents than Andrew Carnegie, more about New York than Boss Murphy. Listening to his tales of Tammany Hall and the Tenderloin, tenements and pool-rooms, I discovered the America which had never been let in at Six Seventy-Seven Fifth Avenue. Unlike my comrades in Spartansburg, he held no brief against the Vanderbilts : he pitied them. They were a "plug-hat brigade," "a bunch of mugs scared of

their own shadow, "a no-good crowd." Thanks to Pat, I learned how to fight back and roll my own cigarettes and ideas. He had made great plans for my future. The moment the war was over, I was to claim \$3,000,000 left me by my great-grandfather and open a chain of garages to be managed by my team-mate. . . .

"There ain't no better business in the world," he explained, wiping the mud off his face. "You meet swell guys, you treat them square and the first thing you know they run you for the Assembly. Another fifty thousand bucks or so and you are a Congressman. . . ."

This sounded fascinating but in the meanwhile there were dispatches to be delivered. As a rule, we drove for sixteen hours, with the remaining eight consumed by sleep and meals. But when the crackling, spitting signal bombs warned us of the approach of an attack, all rules were suspended and the very mention of food or rest dismissed with a shrug of the shoulders. Accustomed as we grew to the night work with its dangers of being smashed up by a heavy artillery truck or shot by our own snipers, the three-day battle of July 15-July 18 squeezed every ounce of strength out of our unwashed, empty-bellied bodies.

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"To hell . . . I can't . . . I won't . . ." screamed Pat, when shortly after midnight of July 18 we were summoned once more by the officer in charge of the dispatchers.

The latter merely pointed to a batch of sealed envelopes on his desk.

"Got to be done," he said. "Unless they are delivered to Ypres before daybreak, there will be . . ."

He frowned. He could not finish. He too had been on his feet for the last seventy hours.

We took a stiff drink and started.

"Lead the way," said Pat, looking past my shoulder. "Lead the way in your lousy car, damn you," he repeated hysterically. "Don't you know what it means to lead the way?"

"I do. But you always wanted . . ."

"That was always. To-night ain't always. I am scared, hear me? Laugh at me now, God damn your soul. . . ."

I was scared much more than he but the shock of seeing that hard-bitten fighter rant and go to pieces made me immune to danger.

I was driving with my eyes half-closed, zig-zagging between the artillery trucks, ignoring the oaths hurled at me by the men who were marching.



along that pitch-dark road like so many wound-up robots. My mind was blank. I was throwing out the clutch. I was shifting the gears. I was stepping on the gas. I was doing everything I was supposed to do, but all of it was done in a haze.

Once in a while I turned my head and yelled :

“ Hey, Pat ! Hey, Pat ! Are you following me ? ”

But I could not hear my own voice through the din of whizzing shells, roaring trucks, marching feet and angry shouts, and I could see nothing behind me but a fast moving cloud of blackness. I drove perhaps ten miles more and thought I was making out the skeletons of the shelled buildings of Ypres, when all of a sudden—the whole thing lasted less than a split second—the road ahead of me shook, opened up and threw a rain of mud and stones in my face. My right foot reached for the brakes. And then . . .

—I raised my head slowly. It seemed I was awakened by a peculiar sound. Someone was mumbling near by. I tried to crawl forward on my hands. The ground under me was soft. The streaming daylight hurt my eyes. It took me several minutes to realise that I was lying in mud, by the side of the road. Right above me I saw my Sun-beam, standing up on its nose, back-seat torn,

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differential missing. I ran my hands quickly down my legs. They were intact. I got up and glanced around. To the left of me I saw a woman kneeling in front of a wooden cross, chanting a prayer. There were just two of us in this wide, rain-soaked field. Squinting my eyes against the sun, I could not detect a single figure for miles around.

"I must have been shell-shocked," I decided and walked slowly toward the woman.

"Where am I?" I asked, first in English, then in French.

She did not answer.

I shook her by the shoulder.

"Where am I?" I repeated.

She brushed my hand off her shoulder.

"Go away," she said in French. "I am talking to my God."

Her face, hands and dress were covered with mud. She wore no shoes and her thin grey hair hung loose. I waited for a moment, then went back and started up the winding, deserted road. My head ached. I had to support it with both hands. It felt as if it weighed fifty pounds. Every half an hour or so I stopped and sat down. Once I fell asleep. I could not have been making more than one mile per hour because I was nowhere near Ypres by sunset.

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It was getting dark again when a few hundred feet ahead of me I saw a car parked in the middle of the road. There were four men in it, wearing British uniforms. Judging by the cap of the one who sat in the back, he was a General. Within ten feet of the car I straightened up and clicked my heels. My salute remained unacknowledged.

"I am an American soldier, sir," I said. "I was shell-shocked or gassed last night while on my way to Ypres with dispatches. May I trouble you, sir. . . ."

The General continued to sit with his back toward me. I made a few more steps forward and then I saw his eyes. He was dead. And so were his three companions. All four had been gassed. If my Sunbeam had not been smashed by a piece of shrapnel, I too would have been dead by then. As it was, I happened to be knocked out too far beyond the zone of the gas attack. What gas I did get in my lungs was not enough to kill. All of this was explained to me a week later in the American dressing-station in Canaples where I was brought by the self-same truck that a few days before had carried the body of Pat O'Connor, the Brooklyn fireman, who introduced me to America.

"WHERE are your medals, Neil ? "

"Medals ? What medals ? "

"Didn't you get the Legion of Honour or the Distinguished Service Cross or whatever it is that they paste on a hero's chest ? "

"I am not exactly a hero."

"Neil is not a hero ! Neil is not a hero ! Neil is not a hero ! Let's put it to music. . . ."

Shrieks of laughter and a salvo of applause. . . .

"Hey, musicians ! Play something snappy, something suitable to welcome the return of a medal-less hero."

The musicians whispered among themselves and dancing was resumed to the tune of the newest fox-trot.

The ceremony of homecoming was over. The six hundred highly eligible boys and girls gathered at Beaulieu, the Vanderbilt mansion in Newport, on the occasion of my sister's coming-out party were not willing to miss their fun just because I chose to return to America, unexpected and unheralded. There would have been no point in explaining to them that a gassed soldier shipped back home for treatment was not permitted to cable the date of his

departure, the name of the ship or even the fact of his arrival. So I settled down in a chair in the farthest corner of the ball-room and prepared to watch them in silence.

They danced past me, holding each other much closer than the doughboys and their mademoiselles on Saturday night at Bar-le-Duc. They swallowed their champagne with a speed that would have made my hard-drinking friends in Spartansburg gasp in astonishment. They exchanged hugs with an ease that would have put to shame the U.S. Marines on a forty-eight hour leave in Paris. Their voices covered the saxophones, their laughter shook the chandeliers. Each time they spotted me in my corner, they waved their hands and cried :

“ Still no medals, Neil ? ”

“ Have you got nothing to wear except this silly khaki outfit ? ”

“ Stop being a crab ! ”

“ What are you, a teetotaller ? ”

Finally I got up. Only two summers ago they had been, most of them, my close friends. Now we were total strangers.

My head hung low, keeping close to the wall and sidestepping the dancers, I worked my way out of the ball-room, climbed the stairs to my quarters,

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packed my bag and left my parents' house by the servants' entrance. The boat for New York was not due to sail until after midnight. Waiting for it, I wrote a long letter to T. R. Aside from Pat O'Connor, T. R. was the only American I had ever met.

I was leaving Newport for America.

## 6

FOUR MONTHS LATER, on an Armistice-drunk night of 1918, I sat on the porch of the familiar house on Sagamore Hill, listening to the booming voice of my idol. It was the first party given by the Roosevelts since the death of Quentin and it turned out to be the last encounter between T. R. and his admiring friends.

"Why aren't you dancing, Neil?" he asked, appearing in the doorway. "Soldiers must dance. Dance and fight. Come. I'll introduce you to the young ladies."

I thanked him profoundly. I had already met the young ladies. Met them years ago. What I wanted now was a talk, a talk with someone who would be patient enough to listen, tolerant enough not to sneer.

"All right," he said, settling his massive frame next to me. "Let's have it. What is it? A heart-break? A general disillusionment? The malady of the idle rich?"

I explained. I told him about Pat O'Connor and the night on the road to Ypres, about the reception given to me in Newport and my parents' insistence that I should choose a career "befitting a Vanderbilt."

"Befitting a Vanderbilt!" he repeated slowly but did not laugh. "I am afraid, my boy, that a grave disappointment is awaiting your sweet mother. What is there indeed in this new America born in Château-Thierry that could possibly befit a scion of a Fifth Avenue mansion?"

"That's just it," I exclaimed, mistaking his sad irony for sympathy with my ideas. "The country is over-run with bankers and railroad executives."

"Is it?" His lips twisted. "You must be better informed about the country than I am, Neil. In all my born years, boy and man, Rough Rider and President, I have never met a banker or a railroad executive. All I saw were promoters and stock-jobbers. . . ."

He stopped short and frowned, as if displeased with himself for doing his thinking aloud.

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"I don't want to bother you," I said timidly, rising to go.

"Wait. Ever read Disraeli's speeches?"

I admitted I had not.

"He was by far the cleverest man produced by the nineteenth century. Here's what he said of life: 'Youth is a blunder, maturity a struggle, old age a regret. . . .' There's the answer to all your queries. Now go and dance and stake your claim to blunder while the staking is good."

Despite his famous, toothful smile he sounded bitter and worn out. The death of Quentin combined with Wilson's rejection of his offer to head a division in France was evidently too much for even his indomitable heart.

We shook hands. He said he would like to talk to me again "sometime next week." Next week never came. When I saw him again, on a bleak and biting January morning, I had to fight my way through the thick crowd of some five thousand men, women and children—who stood bareheaded, knee-deep in slush and snow—in order to get near the place where he lay in his oak coffin, covered by the flag and surrounded by the faces that meant so much to him, to America, to the world.

The solemn General Wood, his steel-like eyes



riveted upon the coffin of the man who had made him, oblivious of the presence of Vice-President Marshall, General March and the rest of officialdom that had tried its level best to unmake him.

The mammoth Taft, tears streaming down his bulging cheeks, thinking perhaps of that fatal day in Chicago when he had had to pick up the glove thrown at him by his former lord and master. Were Theodore able to speak now what would he say to his Secretary of War and his successor in the Presidency, his bosom pal and sworn foe, "Bill" Taft? Would he accuse him again of having "sold out" to the steel and railroad magnates the moment he, Theodore, moved his trunks out of the White House, or would he admit now that he who builds an Industrial Empire must be prepared to march to the measure of Big Industries?

The formidable Joe Cannon, Czar Cannon of the House of Representatives, weeping unashamed, bidding his farewell to the Washington that was.

The fragile, white-bearded Henry Cabot Lodge—the last, the very last of the Great Bostonians—leaning on the arm of Senator Chamberlain and peering into the face of the man in the coffin. He is nearly seventy, is Lodge, and whatever there was that was important, gratifying and thrilling in his

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three-score and ten is going to be buried in a few minutes now. The many fights with the political bosses, the three campaigns against Bryan, the cry of Preparedness, the feud with Wilson—all of it was done by the two of them, always it was Theodore and Henry, Henry and Theodore.

Right in back of Lodge and next to the immaculate, bespatted Nicholas Longworth—who is supporting his wife, Princess Alice, tenderly—is Captain Archibald Roosevelt. Standing erect, as if at attention. . . . Very thin, very pale, not fully recovered from his heavy wounds, the only “eaglet” present at the funeral, the other two—Theodore Jr. and Kermit—being still with the troops somewhere in France.

I watch for a moment Archibald's bloodless face, then I shift my eyes and take in the crowd back of me. The glittering uniforms, the shining silk hats, the mighty array of medals. The towering bulk of William Randolph Hearst, the flaming red hair of Mayor Hylan, the tightly drawn lips of Governor Alfred E. Smith, the Members of the Cabinet, the Generals, the Admirals, the Senators, the Governors, the Publishers, the America of the past and the America of the present.

The America of the future—the children from the

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Oyster Bay Cove School—remained outside the Church. One of its representatives, a tiny boy in a brown suit, had climbed a snow-covered locust-tree overhanging the grave and remained motionless all throughout the funeral.

The narrow road leading to the Cemetery being too steep for automobiles, we had to walk, all of us. The snow was beginning to melt now and was falling on our bare heads from the locust- and cedar-trees lining the road up the hill. When we reached the summit of that hill overlooking Oyster Bay Cove and the Roosevelt Estate on the mainland beyond, we saw the grave and stood still. Vice-President Marshall and the other dignitaries were puffing and panting. It was not easy for them to keep up with T. R. even after his death.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE PENNY PAPER

*What Frank Munsey thought – Northcliffe's advice – And Harry Chandler's – And William Randolph Hearst's – The battle of the Penny Paper – Libelling Charlie Chaplin – Scoring the year's biggest scoop – The long arm of Herbert Fleischhacker – Entry of Mr. Isidore Kresel – The "château-annex."*

#### I

"MAKE, BORROW OR STEAL three million dollars. Then shop around for a good newspaper. I know of no other way for a young man to enter the publishing business."

Frank Munsey was speaking. I was sitting in his huge green-carpeted office in the old *Sun* building. I had come seeking advice.

"How about beginning at the bottom, sir?"

"Stuff and nonsense. They are wiping the floors of the corner-salons with the fellows who tried to work their way up from the bottom."

"But didn't you yourself. . ."

"Never mind me. I am an exception. I was damn' lucky. That's all. Fools say—' Frank Munsey bought forty newspapers and made forty millions because

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he worked hard for forty years ! ' Rot ! Work had nothing to do with my making forty millions. Luck. Ninety-nine per cent luck, one per cent work. Lots of others who worked much harder than I have are long since cutting dolls in the poor house."

" So your advice is . . . "

" Bluff your parents into giving you three million dollars."

It would have taken a much better man than I to follow Frank Munsey's advice. I was twenty-one and I began my mornings with a strong dose of Arthur Brisbane. I believed in Work.

When I walked once more into the green-carpeted office six weeks later, I was a reporter on the New York *Herald*. I came to plead with Mr. Munsey, who had just bought the *Herald* from the James Gordon Bennett Estate, not to dismiss the old staff. He told me to get out and mind my own damn' business. I called him a shyster.

" You won't have pockets in your shroud," I said, backing toward the door. " Some day you will have to distribute your forty millions among your employees."

I was wrong again. When Frank Munsey finally died six years later, he left his forty millions to the Metropolitan Museum. " The bray of a

heart-broken jackass"—as Mencken described that amazingly cruel will. Mencken was wrong too. Munsey chose the Metropolitan Museum as the main beneficiary of his estate not because of stupidity but because it tickled his heart, the heart of an old sadist, to leave his money to an institution which buys the work of *dead* artists only.

Fired by the new owner of the *Herald*, I was lucky enough to get a job on the *New York Times*. The two years that I spent on the *Times*, first as their reporter in Albany, New York, then as their correspondent in Seattle, were the two happiest years of my life. The legendary Mr. Van Anda—then the managing editor of the *Times*—may have been a taskmaster but my admiration for him made all assignments thrilling and all headaches worthwhile. I know of no better school for a youngster than the *New York Times*. If I had to begin my life again, I would prefer a twenty-dollar-a-week job on the *Times* to a two-hundred-dollar-a-week position on any other newspaper.

While on the Pacific Coast I met Lord Northcliffe, who stopped in Vancouver on his way round the world, and then my trouble began. The two-hour conversation with Northcliffe on the golf-links near

Victoria cost me my share of the Vanderbilt Estate and several years of misery.

Not unlike Frank Munsey, Lord Northcliffe believed that I should become a newspaper publisher.

"Why don't you start an illustrated daily in California? Something on the style of the *Mirror* in London or the *ABC* in Madrid," he said to me when we reached the eighteenth hole. "Forget about New York. California is the country of the future. In ten years from now it will be the most important state of the Union. A penny newspaper in Los Angeles! That's the thing for you to do, my boy."

I had no money, I explained.

"Get it from your parents."

I smiled sadly and informed him that my parents would rather see me burn in hell than publish a newspaper. In fact, I was asked by them to leave their house and was obliged to live on my meagre salary for a while when they first found out that I was working on the *New York Times*.

"I see," said Northcliffe. "They are rather old-fashioned, aren't they? But what is to prevent you from organising a corporation and selling stock in your newspaper to your would-be readers?"

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There was nothing in the laws of the State of California to prevent my following Northcliffe's advice. Unfortunately . . .

*Incipit tragædia.*

### 2

HAD THE MEN who helped me organise the Vanderbilt Newspapers, Inc., been lucky, we would have prospered. But they happened to be hard workers. Hard workers and raving amateurs. When they discovered that the presses capable of turning out a mass circulation daily newspaper cannot be bought on a second's notice but must be ordered at least six months in advance, they scratched their heads, looked at each other helplessly and said :

“ Well I'll be damned. Of all the ludicrous, preposterous red-tape. . . .”

There was nothing else for me to do but go to Chandler and Hearst and try to coax them to extend to The Penny Paper the courtesy of their printing plants.

I began my round of friendly visits with Harry Chandler, then and now publisher of the *Los Angeles Times*. He kept me waiting in his ante-chamber for two hours. When he finally received me, his face was set in a hostile frown.



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"What's on your mind, Vanderbilt?"

He knew very well what was on my mind but that was his way of putting fear in my heart.

I began my recital shakingly. He interrupted me at once.

"You'll never make a go of it. Los Angeles is in no need of another newspaper."

I replied by quoting statistics. As statistics go, mine were pretty good. Well doctored though standing on their heads.

He kept on studying his shoes. He disliked me and despised my statistics. His answer was, no. Not only would he not let me use his presses but . . . He did not qualify that "but" of his. The inference was that I should be prepared to be attacked by him when, if and as The Penny Paper became a reality.

Large drops of cold perspiration on my forehead, I motored to the Ambassador. Mr. William Randolph Hearst happened to be in town and was willing to see me. His handshake was friendly, his smile ingratiating. It was twenty-six years, almost to a day, since his newspapers had attacked my parents in a manner which would make Walter Winchell blush and send for aromatic spirits of ammonia. I suppose I should have hated him but strangely enough I was fascinated by his medieval personality.

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I say medieval because except for his conventional twentieth-century clothes nothing about him suggested his connection with the world of to-day. If there is such a thing as reincarnation, he must have been, centuries ago, a Duke of Burgundy engaged in merciless combat with a King of France. Dress him in rich velvets and put a set of armour around his bulging shoulders, and he would fool his own star reporters into mistaking him for a fabulously wealthy Baron distributing bags of gold. A walking anachronism in New York, he should be observed on his immense ranch at San Simeon where he is Lord and Master of everything he surveys, where his numerous vassals would not so much as raise their eyebrows were he to declare his Secession from the United States. His quarrels with Wilson, Hoover, Theodore and Franklin D. Roosevelt could have been easily avoided had the inhabitants of the White House disclosed a better knowledge of the Middle Ages. They thought of him as a mere forty-ninth State of the Union. It never dawned on them that he was (and is) a Sovereign Power, not unlike Burgundy under King Louis XI.

The spectacle of Hearst, blinding at all times, impressed me so much more strongly because I called on him right after talking to Chandler.

Something must be radically wrong with the classifications of the *Who's Who*, for it is impossible to believe that both men belong to the same profession. One of the two is not a publisher.

"Los Angeles is not the place for you," declared Hearst after I explained to him the purpose of my visit. "Here's what I want you to do. I am about to start a tabloid in New York. I will hire you as editor. You know nothing about editing a newspaper but your name is worth thirty thousand dollars a year to me. You will leave to-night for New York and report to Arthur Brisbane. My secretary here will attend to your transportation. Good-bye and good luck."

He got up and extended his hand, a flabby hand large enough to carry the heaviest sword of Burgundy.

I was out in the corridor before I had a chance to tell him that I could not accept his offer. In San Simeon or in Los Angeles, nobody can tell anything to Hearst. He does the telling, and it is up to the vassals either to obey his orders or accept the consequences. I was twenty-five. I accepted the consequences.

## 3

WHEN talking about the Freedom of the Press, do not overlook the existence of jealous competitors, department stores, mortgage holding companies and powerful railroads. I did in 1923 and I paid dearly for my ignorance.

The circulars announcing the creation of The Vanderbilt Newspapers, Inc., promised to our would-be readers that their Penny Paper would defy any and all public enemies, no matter how influential or firmly entrenched in California. This amounted to a declaration of war and the first battle took place almost immediately. The two second-hand printing presses we bought from an insolvent daily in Colorado were re-routed while on their way to Los Angeles. One was sent to Seattle and reached us seventy-two hours before the appearance of our first issue. The other turned up in Mexico City six weeks after we started running.

"Accidents will happen," said the railroad officials.

More than one accident befell us in the following few weeks.

No local newspaper would accept our full page advertisement announcing the forthcoming

appearance of the Los Angeles *Illustrated Daily News*. No real estate company would rent us bill-board space. Only one transportation concern would agree to display our neatly-drawn cards on street-cars, buses or steamships. No shop, with the exception of a few humble dry-cleaning establishments, would put our sign in its window. We pleaded, we reasoned, we tried to distribute bribes. All in vain. When we would ask—"Why are you so adverse to making a few extra dollars," there would be silence, dropping of the eyes, uneasy sighs, clumsy alibis.

All legitimate channels for advertising closed to us, we had to circus the birth of The Penny Paper.

We hired fifteen airplanes, equipped them with megaphones and voice-amplifiers, and sent them flying over the vast area of Greater Los Angeles, shouting from the skies :

"Buy the new Penny Paper. . . ."

We engaged a troupe of stranded clowns and made them parade through the streets, carrying huge signs on their backs.

And finally—three cheers for Mack Sennett !—we mobilised a regiment of bathing beauties. Much to the amazement of the sedate citizens of the Most Pious City on Earth, they woke up on the morning of September 3, 1923 (September 3 was my

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mother's birthday), to discover that "Buy Penny Paper," "See Yourself in Pictures," "Opposition Prohibits Advertising Otherwise" and similar phrases could be built of human blocks. . . . It took thirteen shapely bodies to build "Buy Penny Paper," twenty-three to build "See Yourself in Pictures," etc. "Opposition Prohibits Advertising Otherwise" proved to be our most efficient slogan because the girl carrying the letter "P" of the word "Prohibits" on her back possessed the most attractive curves in Greater Los Angeles.

At 2 a.m. on September 3, while the city was asleep and the night-watchmen drowsy, we hired one hundred and fifty urchins, armed them with large buckets of so-called "unremovable" paint and brushes and told them that before sunrise the phrase "Buy Penny Newspaper" should decorate the sidewalks in front of every hotel, bank, church and apartment house. Thirty of our painters had to be bailed out by me the next morning but it took well over a month for the irate landlords to wash "Buy Penny Newspaper" off their sidewalks.

All of this was very admirable, if sophomoric, but it failed to solve our greatest problem—the problem of distribution. The stands controlled by our competitors were obviously out of the question. We had

either to build our own stands on space rented from the city or make a staggering offer to the independent stands. We did both. It cost us many thousand dollars to erect our orange-coloured stands in Los Angeles, Hollywood, Beverly Hills, Long Beach and Pasadena. And we had to guarantee as much as \$700 a week to the stands situated on the busy corners in the down-town section of Los Angeles. No drunken fool could have spent his money more recklessly, but there was no choice. Unless we succeeded in making the fact of our existence known at once, we were licked !

On the night of the appearance of No. 1 of The Penny Paper I held a reception in my office for a few friends, Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, Will Rogers and Charlie Chaplin among them. When the first copy came off the press, I took it with trembling hands and passed it to my guests.

“ How does it strike you ? ”

When they reached page two, their jaws dropped.

“ Anything wrong ? ”

I remember the expression of thorough bewilderment on Charlie Chaplin's face.

“ What is it, Neil ? ” he asked, pointing at the headline in front of him.

I came closer and looked at it. When I was able

to move again, I rushed downstairs, taking three steps at a time. The whole of page two was given to the dirtiest and the most libellous story ever written about Charlie Chaplin. Less than one hour had passed since I had seen the final proof of that page. Someone had used my short absence from the composing-room to throw out the original contents of page two and squeeze in that monstrous article. It took the combined forces of several private detective agencies to discover the identity of the culprit. Not before the following afternoon did I have the satisfaction of firing that man. In the meanwhile the presses had to be stopped, hundreds of copies destroyed and page two re-made. Instead of appearing on the streets well ahead of other papers, we were bound to be the very last.

I was still rioting in the press-room when a boy came running from my office.

"You are wanted on the phone, Mr. Vanderbilt."

I waved him aside.

"They say it's awfully important, Mr. Vanderbilt."

Nothing was more important for me at that moment than page two.

A few minutes later the boy returned.

"The gentleman says you'll regret it for the



balance of your life if you don't come on the phone at once."

"What's his name?"

"Something like Tickle or Nickle."

I knew no one by that name.

"Tell him to call me back in one hour."

"But he says he's got to talk to you before the paper appears."

I swore and went on the phone.

"Whoever you are," I began, "I cannot talk to you now. . . ."

"Wait, Neil. . . ."

Then I recognised his voice. It was Karl Bickel of the United Press, then an aspiring young man, now the head of that far-flung organisation.

"I am awfully sorry, Karl, but . . ."

"Wait. . . . There's been a hell of an earthquake in Japan . . . Half the country is in ruins . . . Over five thousand killed. . . ."

The Penny Paper was the only paper that night in California which carried the news of the Great Japanese Earthquake of 1923, in its first edition.

"The luck of all fools," said my competitors who had helped me to score the biggest scoop of that year.

WE HAD expected to start with about 50,000 circulation. Thanks to the earthquake in Japan we sold 125,000 copies before the sunrise of September 3rd. Thirty days later our average daily circulation amounted to 280,000 copies which was 50,000 copies more than the *ABC* figures of Fred Bonfils' *Denver Post* and over 100,000 copies more than the then Sunday circulation of Hearst's Los Angeles *Examiner*—the two biggest sellers in the daily field west of Chicago. We owed at least three-quarters of that truly amazing success to the methods of warfare used by our competitors. Unable to talk Los Angeles out of buying The Penny Paper, they concentrated on our newsboys. At first they used intimidation and bribery, then fists and clubs were swung into action. Our hospital bills became exceedingly heavy ; from fifty to one hundred boys had to be treated weekly for serious bruises, lacerations, etc. The W. J. Burns Detective Agency employed by me to identify our foes was outspoken in its reports. It named names. It advised me to file a complaint with the D.A.'s office, although it entertained no illusions as to the treatment I, a newcomer, would be accorded by a man

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depending for his re-election on the good will of my enemies.

After due consideration and many wasteful conferences with lawyers, I decided to fight back in my own way. Each night we appeared, carrying on our front page the portraits of our newsboys beaten by the thugs. The caption read : " Is Los Angeles going to stand for such jungle methods of competition ? "

Los Angeles registered its sympathy by rushing to buy my paper but the guerilla warfare continued unabated. Finally one night a lighted torch was thrown atop one of our trucks driven by a crippled veteran. The truck caught fire and the veteran suffered heavy burns. This was a bit too rough even for Southern California. The following morning the local post of the American Legion called an indignation meeting and voted a resolution demanding an immediate investigation by the D.A.'s office. Our circulation jumped to 300,000 copies, and then our enemies decided to change their tactics. Their thugs were recalled and replaced by bankers.

One morning—I was suffering from an abscessed ear and was spending that week in a hospital—I received a frantic call from my business manager. The bank where I had borrowed \$50,000 a few

weeks before on my note at hand wanted me to take up my loan at once.

"Couldn't they wait at least until after the doctors operate on my ear?"

"They won't. We either must pay to-day before closing time or . . ."

I understood only too well the meaning of that "or." At ten minutes to three that afternoon I was brought to the bank in a closed car. I had 51,000 dollars in cash—the principal and the interest. Although I could have handed that money—raised at the price of sacrifice and humiliation—to my business manager, I insisted on a personal appearance. I brought a cameraman along. I suppose the bank would have gladly written those 50,000 dollars down to profit and loss in order to avoid the sight of my bandaged head in front of the teller's cage. Ten years later, while waiting for President Roosevelt in the executive offices of the White House, I met that banker again. He rushed to me with outstretched arms and said—"Well, well. . . . How are you, my boy? . . . It seems only yesterday we had that funny misunderstanding in Los Angeles. . . . And here we are, ten years later, both of us inspired by the same friendship for a great American. . . ."

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My next encounter with the bankers took place in San Francisco where I had the misfortune of starting a tabloid shortly after the initial success of The Los Angeles *Daily Illustrated News*. This time I had to deal with an infinitely shrewder, more suave and more dangerous enemy.

Then in 1924, just as it is now in 1934, San Francisco was being run by Herbert Fleishhacker, the richest man on the Pacific Coast and the head of the most active bank west of Chicago. I was warned by my associates not to antagonise Fleishhacker.

“Whatever else you do,” they said to me, “leave that fellow alone. He has his finger in every pie. Southern Pacific, Standard Oil of California, banks, lumber, department stores, steamship companies, Stanford University. . . . Why he even owns that paper box factory where he started his career as a delivery boy. . . .”

The fun began with the very first issue of our San Francisco tabloid. We attacked the Southern Pacific. Fleishhacker laughed and said that I was a damn fool. Didn't I know that he *was* the Southern Pacific and that he would see to it that I never got a single inch of advertising from any of his enterprises? I answered his message by attacking his candidate for Mayor.

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The first round was a draw. Our circulation went up but we lost what little advertising we had had in the beginning. The following rounds were Fleish-hacker's. With no money coming to our box-office, our ever-increasing circulation proved to be a millstone around our necks. It became clear to me that we should get rid of our San Francisco tabloid but I was out-voted by my stockholders. Influenced by some mysterious "banking experts" they would not listen to my advice. I was told that the money made by us in Los Angeles and Miami—we invaded the latter city at the time of the Florida boom—should be used to support our very expensive child in San Francisco.

### 5

THE COLLAPSE of the Florida Boom and our staggering losses in San Francisco taxed the resources of the Los Angeles *Illustrated Daily News* to a point where in order to meet our bills we had to raise the cash. To go to the bankers would have been a waste of time. As much as I hated it, I had to call on my parents. I asked them to lend me what would have sooner or later become mine according to the terms of my grandfather's will. The negotiations were lengthy and exceedingly painful for both sides.

There was no reason at all why my parents should finance an enterprise which they loathed or why I personally should pay for the stubbornness of my stockholders but there was the name of the Vanderbilts to be protected.

After weeks and weeks of conferences marked by a spectacular display of irritation and resentment, I was told that I would be given a certain sum of money, provided I agreed to remain President of The Vanderbilt Newspapers Inc. in name only and surrender my authority to Mr. Isidore J. Kresel, a New York attorney recommended by my parents' firm of lawyers. Mr. Kresel was to be paid for his services a very handsome retainer—many times more than I ever received while managing the three tabloids. The idea of a Wall Street lawyer at the head of a chain of anti-corporation newspapers was ludicrous in the extreme. I raved and ranted but my associates in Los Angeles were getting hysterical and at the end I had to give in. What followed my surrender is a matter of record. The Vanderbilt Newspapers Inc. went to the wall in June 1927. They may have withstood the pressure of our San Francisco losses and the impossibility to collect from our advertisers in Florida but the policies introduced by Mr. Kresel would have killed any newspaper.

Sufficient to say that right in the midst of the Coolidge-Davis-La Follette campaign Kresel forced us to desert La Follette and come out for Coolidge—a neat trick which cost us around 150,000 copies in circulation. Having built our reputation in San Francisco as dyed-in-the-wool enemies of the Southern Pacific, we suddenly appeared one morning with a full page editorial praising the self-same Southern Pacific.

The sequel to the Kresel Epic was written seven years later in a crowded court-room in New York. The man recommended to my parents for his “ability, industry and honesty” was found guilty by a jury for aiding the officers of the Bank of the United States in misappropriating the funds of their depositors: but the Appellate Division of the Court reversed the conviction and exonerated Mr. Kresel. I do not begrudge him his retainer on the Vanderbilt Newspapers Inc.—the retainer paid to him out of my share of my grandfather’s estate—and I have long since forgotten the humiliation he caused me in California, but I do wish him ill for one thing: for making me cross the continent twice a month in order to listen to his lectures.



THE SPRING of 1927 found me back in New York. My wife had left me. I was not on speaking terms with my family. I was penniless.<sup>1</sup> Not knowing where my next cent would come from, I rented a tiny two-room flat in a dilapidated walk-up which stood on the site of the present Squibb Building, near the north-eastern corner of Fifth Avenue and 57th Street.

They were tearing down my grandmother's mammoth and monstrous château across the street. She had just sold it to a firm of realtors headed by the late Frederick Brown for \$7,500,000 cash, a transaction for which she was severely reprimanded by Arthur Brisbane.

"Mrs. Vanderbilt," he said, "will live to shed bitter tears of regret."

Around the time of my grandmother's death—April, 1934—she could have bought back the site where the château stood and where Messrs. Bergdorf Goodman are selling women's wear at the present—for a fraction of the \$7,500,000 pocketed by her in 1927.

<sup>1</sup> The trust fund of \$1,903,000 created for me by my grand-parents was surrendered by me in its entirety to the creditors of the Vanderbilt Newspapers, Inc.

I hoped that no one in New York would discover where I lived but I did not count on the news-instinct of the janitor. The tabloids made a great to-do of my renting a \$40 apartment. They said that my flat should be known as "château-annex." The name stuck. And so did the address. Two nights after I moved to the "château-annex," I was entertaining a party of thirty-eight people who brought their own refreshments and sandwiches. And from that day on my bell never stopped ringing. Whatever it was that attracted the people to my parlour-and-bedroom affair, they thought nothing of sitting on the floor and wiping their hands on a newspaper. My late friend John Brodix took down one night the names of the people who invited themselves to the "château-annex." The list read as follows: "Jimmy Walker and Miss Whosis, Carl Van Vechten and wife, Bascom Slemp and three fat Congressmen, Tom Mix without his horse, Marshal Neilan and wife, Charlie Chaplin and a tiny brunette, Flo Ziegfeld and eight unidentified blondes, Morris Gest and two Russian-speaking though beardless gentlemen, Phil Payne and Walter Winchell, The Man Who Says Cal Coolidge Is A Fraud and The Woman Who Denies Ever Having Married Him, Paul Whiteman and his

band, Harold Ross and wife, Walter P. Chrysler Jr., Martin Ansarge and two lawyers from Max Steuer's office, the visiting Sheriff of Reno, Nevada, and his friend, a plain-clothes man from Brooklyn Headquarters, two elderly fellows from the New York Yacht Club who begged Neil not to tell anyone that they came to call on him and a yawning model from Hattie Carnegie's. . . ."

I got up after sunset, went to bed after sunrise. My new friends had been leading that sort of life for years but to me it was a novelty, a fascinating novelty. The few hours I was alone—between two parties—were spent interviewing people anxious to engage my services. Eighty per cent of them were nuts, the remaining twenty crooks. Within one week I was asked to preside over the Dancing Marathon in Wisconsin, to start a new religion (two hundred dollars per week and expenses), to endorse a cereal, to collect funds for a polar expedition, to act as best man at the wedding of a prominent racketeer, to demonstrate a European car, to appear in a five-a-day vaudeville and to play the part of my great-great-grandfather Commodore Vanderbilt in the revival of an old-fashioned melodrama.

I brought my job-seeking interviews to an abrupt end on the morning when I was offered the position

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of band leader in a second-rate midtown hotel. Not that I was offended but it so happened that one hour earlier I had received a telephone call from Arthur Brisbane. He wanted me to join the staff of the then struggling *Daily Mirror* and tell him and Hearst what was wrong with that paper. It seemed rather ironical that I should wind up where W. R. had wanted me to start four years before but I was desperately short of cash. It was still more ironical that after being forced to liquidate my very clean and very pious tabloids because my family despised all newspapers, I should earn my bread and butter in their home town, helping to edit a sheet which thrived on dirt and had no use for piety. But Society has a logic of its own. Ask them why they flock each summer to Bailey's Beach in Newport, to the untidiest beach in the whole of America, used by the U.S. Navy as a dumping ground for refuse, and they will accuse you of Rextugwellism.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### WHEN DAY IS DONE

*The morning mail at a Fifth Avenue mansion – “ Not the British Embassy ! ” – What to do with an Ambassador – The Fifth Avenue dyed-in-the-wool set – Park Avenue storms Newport, unsuccessfully – The society set-up in Detroit, Los Angeles, Hollywood, San Francisco and the South – What is society worth ? – Fortune-hunters – Court presentations – Washington society – Royalty – The Prince of Wales – Millicent Rogers episode – The two lists of American society : The backbone and the outer fringe.*

#### I

IT IS NINE O'CLOCK of a raw and foggy November morning and the sidewalk outside this fine Fifth Avenue mansion is still deserted but Madam is already up and about to plunge into work. What with the morning mail and the final arrangements for to-night's dinner party, this looks like a hectic day for both her and her private secretary, a prim grey-haired woman with carefully washed wrinkles, dressed in sombre Victorian black.

They begin with the mail. They have to : the massive carved desk is smothered with high stacks of envelopes white and purple, long and short,

suspiciously thick and eloquently thin, engraved and printed.

The cranks are still at it and so are the social climbers and the venerable Prexies.

A man who signs his missive "a Newark, N. J. avenger" declares his firm intention of throwing a bomb in the windows of the mansion at 7 p.m. sharp, Monday next, not a second later. "Humanity has suffered from the oppression of money-laden tyrants," he says, "for the past two thousand years and it would be a crime on my part to postpone the execution of the Verdict any longer."

An "honest railroad worker" in Sioux City, Iowa, can use twelve hundred dollars in bills of small denominations: he knows enough about Madam and her husband to have both hanged but is willing to keep his mouth shut.

A "less fortunate woman" in Indianapolis has just given birth to her second set of twins: four hundred dollars will do.

A "Southern California Seer" ("No branches outside Los Angeles," reads his stationery) is in a hurry to relate his recent dream. He saw Madam and himself lead a great procession of women and children up the slope of a Mountain. There could be no other interpretation of this vision, save that

God had chosen Madam to finance the building of the World's Most Beautiful Tabernacle. "What with the rental from shops on the ground floor and the cut on soft-drinks concessions, we can expect at least a fourteen per cent annual return on our investment," he adds in the concluding paragraph.

The President of a mid-western college has struck upon what seems to him to be a "thoroughly patriotic and eventually self-supporting idea": why not have a summer course for the vacationing girls from the eastern industrial states, dedicated to the proposition of "teaching the needs of Agricultural America" to "the future mothers of our financial leaders." The whole thing would require some two hundred thousand dollars and will be sure to perpetuate Madam's name better than any monument.

The Dean of the Fine Arts department of a north-western university calls Madam's attention to the ugliness of the American landscape. She is about to launch a campaign and she needs ten thousand dollars to enable "The Speakers' Bureau" to take care of the travelling expenses of "the apostles of Beauty."

A "devoted friend of the Redskin children" in Muskogee, Oklahoma, has just seen the photograph



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of Madam attending the opening night at the Metropolitan : " Has it ever dawned on you, my dear lady, that through the simple medium of sacrificing just one of your many strings of pearls you can assure a college education for a score of Indian children ? "

" Diabetes must be and will be exterminated in these United States," airmails a " trained nurse " from Milwaukee. " I know a brilliant young physician who would be able to conquer diabetes were he financed in his experiments. He is too shy to appeal to strangers, hence this letter. . . . "

An " enemy of charity " encloses a note for \$3,000, " Payable one year from the date above " to the order of Madam. Only in this manner would he accept from her the money necessary to complete the building of the Little Theatre in his native town in North Dakota. " So you see," he explains, " you will be acting not as an ' angel ' but merely as our banker, as a human being artistic enough to love the Theatre and shrewd enough to appreciate the soundness of the investment."

" Enough of that, my dear."

" Yes, Madam."

The rest of the crank mail deposited in a voluminous waste-paper basket, the secretary resumes

her recital. Her voice, muffled and monotonous until now, suddenly acquires the quality of ringing metal: she is reading the invitations.

"Mrs. X. wonders if you would care to be present at the luncheon she is giving in the Colony three weeks from to-morrow."

"Mrs. X.? Isn't she that preposterous woman from Oklahoma whose husband struck oil or ran a chain of grocery stores or something?"

"It was oil, Madam."

"Do I know her?"

"Not exactly, although you met her last summer in Newport at Mrs. Y.'s tea. Mrs. Y. has telephoned several times since and was very anxious to have you meet her friend once more. She says Mrs. X. is the most remarkable woman that ever came from the south-west."

Both smile. Both know that Mrs. Y., disinherited by her late husband, has made a regular business of introducing wealthy out-of-town women to Manhattan's social leaders. Both remember a long string of distinctly ill-at-ease ladies—"remarkable," "most unusual," and "striking"—launched in New York and Newport by the indefatigable Mrs. Y.

"Write her a note, my dear, and tell her that I regret a previous engagement. What else?"

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"Dinner at Mrs. Z's. Four weeks from to-day."

"Who is she? Another provincial?"

"Yes, Madam. A distant relative of a western Congressman. Divides her time between here and Washington. Made the British Embassy last spring."

"Not the *British* Embassy, my dear!"

"I am quite certain, Madam. She dined there twice."

"Hm. . . . I suppose I might just as well accept her invitation. They are getting to be quite successful, those provincials, aren't they?"

"Unfortunately."

"How do you suppose they do it? When I was a young girl it used to take a provincial anywhere from five to ten years to be recognised by even a South American Legation in Washington. Who ever thought in those days that the fact of one's being related to a Congressman could impress an Ambassador?"

"The inter-allied debts, Madam. Trying to mollify the western sentiment, no doubt."

"A sad state of affairs, my dear."

"Yes, Madam."

The secretary shakes her head and sighs. How well does she remember the days when no newly-rich could so much as hope to be invited even by

the fourth secretary of the British Embassy in Washington.

"Do you recall, Madam," she says half-dreamingly, "what Sir Cecil used to say about money?"

"Do I? Rather, my dear. That it takes at least three generations to wash off oil and two to exterminate the smell of hogs. . . . Poor old Sir Cecil. . . . It was a fortunate thing for him that he died when Society was still Society and not a hodge-podge of tradesmen and stock-brokers. . . . And speaking about Sir Cecil . . . This reminds me, my dear. Did you finally decide who is to be given the place of honour at the dinner to-night?"

"I am afraid it will have to be the Ambassador, Madam."

"It won't do. I tossed all night long thinking about it. I am not at all sure whether he should be given preference to the Count. It is all very well to call him 'Ambassador' but don't forget that he lost his last diplomatic post more than fifteen years ago."

"I am afraid . . ."

"I know, I know. You mean that luncheon when he never opened his mouth because he was seated three places away from the hostess. I think

we'd better call him up and tell him about our predicament."

"I already have."

"You have? You are taking liberties, aren't you?"

"I thought . . ."

"I forgive you this time, my dear, but it must never happen again. What was his answer?"

"That an Ambassador, even if he is a former Ambassador, ranks above all other guests except the President, the Vice-President, the Speaker of the House and the Governor of the State where the hostess resides."

"Did you point out to him that the Count's ancestors participated in the First Crusade?"

"I did."

"And?"

"He said he would much rather plead illness and stay at home. In fact, he was quite nasty about it."

"I have an idea, my dear . . ."

"He anticipated it, Madam."

"You mean he guessed that I might have two tables, with my daughter presiding at the other table?"

"Quite so. He warned me that in case there is

going to be more than one table he is to be put at the one presided over by you."

"The cheek of the fellow ! Who is he, anyway ? Just a common variety of American business man who happened to put his money on the right political horse."

"Why not let him stay at home, Madam ? "

"I can't do that. I must have someone to talk foreign politics with the Count. I do not mind telling you that this sort of thing is playing havoc with my nerves. One dinner more like this and I will be in the hands of my physicians. Worry, worry, nothing but worry. . . . I am all in."

"Won't you rest for an hour or so, Madam, and let me attend to the luncheon ? "

"Rest ? You are joking, my dear ! Don't you know what I have to accomplish between now and luncheon ? "

The secretary glances at Madam's calendar and shakes her head sympathetically : a fitting, a visit to a sick friend and "matinee musicale" at the Plaza, all of it before 1 p.m. Poor Madam ! It must take every drop of her pioneer ancestors' blood to keep up her indomitable courage !

WITH THE EXCEPTION of the Count, invited because of the First Crusade, the men and women seated at the dinner table in the Last Brownstone Mansion belong to the Fifth Avenue "set." Some of them reside in the East Sixties and East Seventies, some have retired to their estates on Long Island, some spend most of the time in London, but all of them were born or lived until recently on the thoroughfare connecting Washington Square with the 110th Street plaza. None of them owes allegiance to the World War or the Bull Market, which distinguishes them from the Park Avenue set that acquired its pearls, chinchilla wraps and yachts only after Gavrilo Princip shot his Archduke. As money goes in America, theirs is the aged-in-the-wood money, made in railroads, banking, tobacco and cotton years before the Battle of Gettysburg. As wealth is counted in a depression-stricken world, they are still multi-millionaires, most of them. They never gambled on margin, they floated too many issues of common and preferred stocks and foreign bonds to retain a single certificate for themselves ; they salted away the bulk of their inherited fortunes in government bonds and cash ; and they did not wait

for the official announcement of the fall of the gold standard to begin their flight from the dollar.

Private bankers and retired capitalists, men-about-town and country squires, they go to considerable pains and great expense to keep their names out of public prints. Neither themselves nor their wives ever talk to the reporters, and, unless subpoenaed by the U.S. Senate, they refuse to disclose the network of their business connections hidden under the aliases of holding companies and investment trusts. On the boards of the vast industrial corporations controlled by them through the ownership of the original stock they are represented by "dummies"—glorified office boys and ex-judges ; on the social pages of the metropolitan newspapers by photographs taken so many years ago as to be of no use whatsoever for the racketeers and kidnappers. Unlike the Park Avenue set, they stay away from Palm Beach and the French Riviera, limiting their infrequent visits to Florida to a ten-day fishing trip off the coast of Miami and letting Europe cross the ocean and come, hat in hand, to their houses in New York and Newport. Brought up in fear of the Great God Blackmail, they travel aboard their yachts or private cars, dread night clubs, distrust show people and do very little



drinking in public. Their daughters of *débutante* age never go out unescorted : a maid-chaperone, dressed in black and built along the lines of the Queen of the Amazons, is invariably awaiting her precious charge in the car outside or in the lobby downstairs, much to the disgust of the unsuspecting gentleman. Their sons are usually shadowed by detectives and bodyguards—a rather unnecessary measure of precaution considering that, with very few exceptions, the younger generation of Fifth Avenue multi-millionaires is more hard-boiled, penny-squeezing and blackmail-wise than their fathers and grandfathers had ever been. In answer to a persistent charity-solicitor who thought that his worthy cause deserved at least a hundred dollar bill, the twenty-year-old son of one of the richest men in America handed him a fifty-cent piece and said : “ Who do you think I am ? Commodore Vanderbilt ? ” The solicitor admitted readily, if not too cheerfully, that in comparison with this stern boy the old Commodore was a softy.

As far as the leaders of the Fifth Avenue set are concerned, there are only two clubs in Greater New York—the Union Club and the New York Yacht Club. Even to-day, thirty years after the first million dollars was made in the automobile

industry, they continue to keep the "Detroit Crowd" out of their two sanctuaries. Not that they find anything wrong with the personal characters of the automotive magnates or fail to appreciate their achievements. It is simply that the Fifth Avenue set is the Fifth Avenue set and any other set is any other set and never the twain shall breathe the air of the same club-house, or land their yachts at the same pier, or bathe on the same beach, or do in the same place any one of the one thousand and one things which constitute the life and the routine of Society.

"The Chairman of the House Committee," read the short note found by me not so long ago in my mail-box in the Union Club, "is obliged to remind you that the members of this Club must exercise extreme caution when inviting strangers to luncheon in the Club's restaurant. My attention has been called to the fact that a gentleman brought here by you last week is not the type of person we care to see on these premises."

The gentleman referred to by the Chairman of the House Committee happens to be one of the leaders of his profession in America. Internationally known and universally admired, he has no faults save one: he does not belong. Back in his home town all doors

are open to him. When he goes over to Europe, he is feasted by the Chambers of Commerce and received by Prime Ministers. To Park Avenue he is a hero and a major prophet. But—and nothing can be done to suppress this “but”—he does not belong to the Fifth Avenue set. It is final, irrevocable, irreparable, not to be bought for money, not to be “fixed up” through connections. Both money—barrels of it—and connections—no end of them—were tried on more than one occasion by the parties who wished to leave their own and break into the Fifth Avenue set. Tried lavishly and magnificently. Tried unsuccessfully.

About six years ago, when General Motors were still known as generous motors and Andrew Mellon was still the greatest Secretary of the Treasury since Alexander Hamilton, a very wealthy Park Avenue woman came to Newport. She came to Newport because Newport is the summer playground of the Fifth Avenue set and because, having failed to qualify in New York, she thought the job of breaking-in would be easier on the sea-shore where humans are supposed to mix more freely. A certified cheque for \$75,000 secured for her one of Newport's spectacular villas for the season and another twenty-five thousand or so the services of an impoverished

lady who used to be in her day a cotillion leader and a dispenser of social graces. The latter, an old hand at the game, knew her job better than to try immediately to force her client on the local leaders. For the first two weeks all was quiet, suspiciously quiet, in the seventy-five-thousand-per-season house. No parties. No visitors. No announcements. Aside from a short morning drive in a substantial-looking but thoroughly conservative open car, both ladies seemed to be perfectly satisfied to stay at home in each other's company. Had it not been for the fact that the old cotillion leader was suddenly able to settle her long-since-overdue bills, Newport would have believed the Park Avenue woman to be some sort of de-luxe hermit, in love with the sea, the flowers and the Rhode Island air. Then—not before the New York papers arrived on the afternoon train did anyone discover it—it became known along Bellevue Avenue that a venerable American statesman—a potential candidate for the Presidency—was arriving in Newport next morning to stay a fortnight, a guest in the Park Avenue woman's villa.

A declaration of war with Japan would not have caused a greater sensation. Telephones rang frantically ; cars rushed to and fro ; a dowager was actually

seen to run out of her house and cross the street *afoot* to the house of her friends.

"A potential candidate for the Presidency is a potential candidate for the Presidency," decided the Elders of the Clan. "Always remember Warren Gamaliel Harding."

By eight o'clock that night several scores of visiting cards were deposited at the mysterious villa and all sorts of offers phoned to the old cotillion leader. Intimate luncheons ("Just you, your delightful friend, her venerable guest and ourselves"); state dinners; clam-bake parties; yacht outings; supper dansants; masquerade balls. . . .

"You are in, my dear," said the old cotillion leader to the Park Avenue woman. "You are in for good."

And so she was "in," but not for good, just for the fortnight that the potential candidate for the Presidency remained in Newport. The day after, when she called up one of her bosom pals to ask her what were her plans for that night, she was told by the butler that Madam was too occupied to come to the phone and would she, please, just give her name and any message she might care to leave. A week later her application for membership in the Spouting Rock Beach Association (where Newport's

finest acquire a sun-tan and swim occasionally) was returned to her marked "considered unfavourably."

The first of the following month found her on Long Island, in Southampton, where she had spent her summers for the past twenty years. Southampton is the summer playground of the Park Avenue set and she belongs there, lock, stock and barrel.

3

SETS, SETS AND SETS. At least two in each and every large city between the Atlantic and the Pacific. Even Detroit—free-wheeling as its social reputation is—accommodates two sets in its midst—the Gross-point one which remembers the days when Buick was just the last name of an humble individual, and the Dearborn one which dances to the tune played by Uncle Henry. Even Chicago—informal as its millionaires are—provides a background for a bitter feud between the boisterous magnates who built their mansions on Lake Shore Drive and the conservative "old" families that stick to their country houses outside the city limits. Even Los Angeles—a God-forsaken settlement as recently as the late 1890's—talks in awe-stricken tones of the aristocratic West Adams Street set that would never,

never mix with the oil tycoons or the go-getting realtors. Even Hollywood—ridiculous as it is to talk of Society in the capital of Cinderellas and beggars-on-horseback—recognises the Fairbanks-Pickford-Chaplin set that goes for visiting royalty, entertains Professor Albert Einstein and refuses to mix with the “common” stars no matter how many hundreds of thousands of dollars the latter might make per picture. Even Pasadena—a mere winter resort and a suburb of Los Angeles—divides its “Society” in two groups : those who condescend to invite the motion picture people to their houses and those who do not. San Francisco—the old Barbary Coast and the hospitality tradition notwithstanding—takes its social orders from its Burlinghame set (second generation of bankers) which actually snubbed Queen Marie of Rumania and informed her, when her special train came within shouting distance of the Oakland Station, that she would not be “received” but merely admitted. “Don’t they realise, those peculiar people, that I am a granddaughter of Queen Victoria?” asked Her Majesty on that tragic occasion.

South of the Mason and Dixon line the hostility between various social sets reaches a grandeur not surpassed anywhere on earth, except perhaps in the

sacred land of Brahmins and Untouchables. Politics and religion, the family's record in the Civil War, and the occupation of its surviving members, the place of birth and the place of début, everything is brought into play, everything—even the fact of one's second cousin being married to a Yankee—that might be used as incriminating evidence. And while it is agreed and understood by everybody that a full-fledged member of Southern Society must be a democrat, a gentile, a non-catholic, a direct descendant of a family that fought under General Robert E. Lee against "that fellow Grant" and preferably not a tradesman—no one has been able to discover so far which particular set is *the* set of Southern Society. Is it Richmond or Charleston? New Orleans or Atlanta? Or is it, after all, Baltimore, where the so-called Bachelors' Cotillion takes place every year—an event the invitation to which is a hall-mark of social distinction to Marylanders? "It is better for a débutante not to be received at the Court of St. James's than not to be invited to the Bachelors' Cotillion," proclaims Baltimore, a remark which never remains unanswered by New Orleans, Richmond, Charleston and Atlanta, each one of these four cities boasting an annual event "immeasurably more exclusive than the Bachelors' Cotillion."



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One thing though must be said about all social sets in the South. None of them bows to money ; none of them is willing to sell its recognition for money ; none of them has any money to speak of. With the exception of Atlanta, where it is possible to find a few families that are both well-to-do and socially prominent, Southern aristocracy consists of land-poor people who have almost forgotten the existence of cash. They live in beautiful country houses ; they entertain lavishly ; they have hordes of servants ; they dress attractively, but all of it is being done on a when, if and as basis, against a background of fast mounting notes-at-hand, first, second and third mortgages, cheques drawn on the Bank of Better Times, etc. From this point of view—minus lavish entertainment and hordes of servants—they are not unlike the blue-blooded Bostonians, rich in memories of the *Mayflower* and portraits of ancestors but badly in need of cash. The similiarity is slight, however, for while the Southerners prefer to marry Southerners, the Bostonians have a knack for finding rich brides or husbands in uncouth New York. When a Virginian talks about the “ disgraceful wealth ” of New York and expresses his thorough contempt for both Fifth Avenue and Park Avenue sets, he is sincere, ninety-nine times out of a

hundred. But when a resident of Brookline, Mass., throws the same cry in the flushed faces of Manhattan millionaires, he means, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, that there is a way of making their wealth less disgraceful : his son will be of age next spring.

The popular legend has it that a thousand-mile westward jump from New York brings a traveller into the realm of good fellowship and democracy. This might be true in the case of "just people"—lawyers, physicians, advertising solicitors and merchants, but the popular legend is just another lie promoted to the ranks of truth by constant repetition in the case of social sets. Never in my life, not even in the Newport house of my grandmother Vanderbilt (*the* Mrs. Vanderbilt in the parlance of social reporters) have I seen such stilted manner, strained conversation and solemn faces as I have observed in San Francisco, in the palaces of the Burlinghame millionaires. Their fathers might have been working as brakemen on the old Union Pacific but their imported British footmen stagger and faint at the sight of a guest eating fish with the wrong fork. The late King Edward VII who liked to tear into his broiled chicken with both hands would never, never have been received in Burlinghame. At best he might have been admitted.

Whenever anyone talks about the "democratic" westerners and the "snobbish" easterners, I think at once of the household routine in the White House—as it was in the days of the poor Iowa boy and hundred per cent westerner, Herbert Hoover, and as it is now under the régime of the Harvard graduate and eastern aristocrat, Franklin D. Roosevelt. In 1929-1932 even a small informal luncheon given by the President for a visiting publisher was supervised by the *maestro* of ceremonies—a tail-coated gentleman from the State Department. In 1935 it does not surprise the servants of the White House to see the President of the United States lead a crowd of some twenty Senators and Cabinet members into the butler's pantry with the cry: "Let's raid the ice-box. . . ."

## 4

SNOBS and climbers, débutantes and dowagers, fortune-hunters and title-aspirants, land-poor aristocrats and gold-laden grocers, provincials and Ambassadors—all of them building high fences and beating their heads against a stone wall, hating each other and boiling in their own juices, and playing, playing, playing, playing every minute of

the time, in boom years and in lean years, from birth until death, playing for all it is worth, the game called Society.

Yachts are built and mammoth parties given, services of the great singers engaged and most expensive summer-houses rented—not for the sake of sport, fun, music or comfort but with the sole desire of building a better yacht than Mrs. X.'s, of giving a more extravagant party than Mrs. Y.'s, of engaging a greater singer than Mrs. Z., of renting a bigger house than anyone else in Newport, Southampton or Bar Harbour.

Why do they do it? What are the stakes they are playing for? What is Society worth—if anything?

There are as many answers to these questions as there are groups, subdivisions and sets. And just as many disappointments.

It would appear on the surface that at least the fortune-hunters cannot be accused of wasting their time. Impoverished Bostonians and striving South American diplomats, broken-down English lords and exiled Russians—they want money and they are willing to sell their names, titles, good looks or positions to the highest bidder. Logic is there, plenty of it, but something peculiar happens to the logic the moment a smart wedding is over. Pity the poor

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fortune-hunter ! His disappointment is profound and his resentment altogether legitimate. When the history of America's illustrious fortune-hunters is written in the years to come, a full, unabridged, unafraid history, it will read like a mile-long record of promises broken and dreams unfulfilled. For, with the exception of half a dozen sages who knew better than to look for easy pickings on Fifth Avenue, every single fortune-hunter who married the daughter of a Manhattan multi-millionaire was gypped by his parents-in-law. Not only do they refuse to deposit anything resembling real money in his name but the very house he steps into on his return from the honeymoon was bought in the bride's name. Worse than that : every single household bill—the butcher's, the grocer's, even the cleaner's—has to be approved by a gloomy individual known as " the trust fund's guardian." More tragic still : in nine cases out of ten, having acquired the title and established herself in international society, the loving bride goes to Reno or Paris a year later and secures a divorce on the grounds of non-support. . . . Non-support ! As if he ever had promised to support her !

Years ago, in the halcyon days of the eccentric newly-rich, it was possible for a Boni de Castellane

to marry an Anna Gould and actually get a portion of the Gould millions. Nothing of that sort could transpire to-day. I know of lots of cases where a fortune-hunter who thought he was marrying for money discovered to his utmost chagrin that he married for love.

"Marry a Fifth Avenue heiress!" exclaimed recently a French Marquis with whom I discussed this turbulent question. "Not on your life! The first thing I know her parents would expect me to work. And then when I tell them to go and jump in the lake, she will divorce me and call herself a Marquise for the rest of her days."

My titled friend was right, amazingly so. Aside from three meals a day, a few suits of clothes and the possibility of staying with his prospective parents-in-law as a non-paying and none-too-welcome guest, he would have got nothing out of his marriage. That is why, when people talk to me in tones of civic indignation of this or that titled foreigner about to corner still another American fortune, my heart bleeds for the poor bridegroom. Let him try to corner even a single twenty-five cent piece belonging to that fortune! If I were a fortune-hunter, I would go after the daughters of bootleggers and laundry-racketeers but I would steer clear of

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Fifth Avenue, of those great families with telephone-exchange names, for fear they would squeeze out of me what little I possess. The social registers of New York, Philadelphia and Chicago are littered with American-born Princesses, Countesses and Marchionesses whose former husbands went back to Europe in tourist-third. The newspapers don't print their stories.

### 5

"THERE is nothing I wouldn't do," said an otherwise sensible lady to me the other day, "for a person or persons who could arrange for me an invitation to your mother's house."

"But why?" I asked. "What's so remarkable about my mother's house? It's a large place, to be sure, but that is about all."

"Don't pretend such simple-mindedness! You know very well that I did not mean the house. What I meant was the people I could meet there. I'll be recognised by Society at once."

"And then?"

"What do you mean, then?"

"Just what I say. Suppose you are invited to my mother's house and are recognised by Society?"

What good will it do you? You are a woman of means, you can go wherever you want and live for your own pleasure. Why should you waste your time and effort bothering with dull, uninteresting, hopelessly mediocre people? ”

“ You don’t understand,” she said. “ I have a daughter. I want her to be presented to the British Court and it cannot be done unless and until I secure a sound social position for myself.”

“ Do you know anything about presentations to the Court of St. James’s ? ”

“ No, but I do know that it would be marvellous for my girl.”

“ Now, listen,” I said. “ I know something about it. My sister was presented to the Court and so were several of my cousins and lots of acquaintances.”

I proceeded to explain to her the technique of those Court Presentations. I told her about the three months spent by each presentee in learning the fine art of curtsying, about the expense and nervous tension involved, about hours and hours of waiting in the car outside Buckingham Palace and some more hours of waiting in the Royal ante-chamber—all of it for the sake of experiencing a split-second thrill of curtsying in front of two middle-aged people who wouldn’t recognise the



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presentee if they ever saw her again and who fail to comprehend why anyone should cross the ocean on such an odd mission.

"I see," said the lady. "And now tell me what I should do in order to make the American Ambassador in London include my daughter in the list of presentees?"

I thought of good old General Dawes and of what he had to say to me about that particular duty which was his for a period of three years: "It is a damn sight better to be a Postmaster-General of the United States and fight off five million job-seeking hyenas than to talk even for a second to a blankety-blank American mother whose daughter was turned down for the Court presentation."

But, alas! Even Dawes—magnificent biblical eloquence, underslung pipe *et al.*—was not able to discourage the American débutantes or their fond mothers. Society—all sets, classes and subdivisions—puts a heavy premium on a daughter of Democracy who bends her knee before Their Britannic Majesties, and no presentee has yet admitted her hidden disappointment. When they come home from London, they say that "it has been just grand." They have to say so because in no other

way can they make their friends miserable, and the business of making one's friends miserable constitutes the real purpose and meaning of Society.

6

SHORT-LIVED as the thrill of the presentees to the Court is, they at least retain sometimes a tangible token of their triumph : a golden spoon or fork, initialled G.R.I. (George Rex Imperator) and picked up by them in the Royal buffet-room in spite of the stern edict which the American Embassy in London issues annually against souvenir-hunting on the premises of Buckingham Palace. The others—dowagers, snobs and climbers—do not get even a golden toothpick for their efforts. When day is done and the last of the guests has left, nothing reminds a hostess of her supposedly brilliant party, except a headache and a feeling of thorough exhaustion. What did her guests talk about ? Small chatter and malicious gossip. What did they say that she has not heard before, heard on numberless occasions ? Nothing, nothing at all. Even the leading wit of the Western hemisphere—what did she utter that is worth repeating ? That the letters N.R.A. stand for “ No Roosevelt Again,” but she

had said that before, several months ago in Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt's house in Newport.

What else, except the usual chaff about stocks and bonds and other men's mistresses? Come to think of it, even the two guests of honour—the ex-Ambassador and the descendant of the First Crusaders—had repeated what even the tabloid readers can recite by heart: that the Disarmament Conference will be a flop and that there will be another war in Europe, if not just now, then surely within the next five years. It pains the hostess to realise that all her work and worry had been in vain, that hers has turned out to be just another dinner. But then it is the sort of thing Society expects her to do—to gather together people who have known each other since infancy and who dislike each other cordially. “I wish I lived in Washington,” says the hostess if she happens to live elsewhere. “There are always new faces in Washington.” She is very much mistaken: not since the memorable visit of General Tom Thumb has Washington Society seen a new face. The Presidents don't go out to parties and as for Senators, Ambassadors, lobbyists and political hangers-on—they have not changed a bit in the last fifty years. Even the Washington widows—that peculiar drippings of the country which the nation

deposits each year on Connecticut Avenue—even they remain identically the same. They are just as rich as they were in the days of Cleveland ; just as firm in their determination to break into the diplomatic set ; and just as capable of discussing the most complicated political subject without having the slightest inkling of what it is all about.

“ Mr. President,” I once asked Harding, “ do you suffer from your forced isolation in the White House ? ”

“ I should say not,” he laughed gaily. “ It saves me from listening to a Washington widow who tells everybody what should be done with our Navy but thinks that ‘ five-five-three ratio ’ is a new way of keeping score at bridge.”

7

THERE REMAINS the reigning European royalty—the great prize for the competing social leaders who divide their lives in two uneven periods : before the visit of Prince Henry of Prussia and after. But Henry is dead and his brother the Kaiser is not in a travelling mood. The Prince of Wales ? But in the first place, his appearances in America are few and far between, and in the second place, His Royal

Highness has a disconcerting habit of showing no preference to any particular hostess. When last in America he thought nothing of dining on Monday in a mansion dating back to 1880 and accepting on Tuesday the invitation of people who bought their first diamond bracelet in 1920. Whom does the Prince really like? The question worries both Fifth Avenue hostesses and New York editors considerably.

"What is her name?" were the first words of the old *Herald's* city editor when I reported to him the night the Prince danced in the late Mrs. Whitelaw Reid's house on Madison Avenue.

"Whose name?" I asked in puzzlement.

"The name of the girl he fancied, you fool!"

"But he fancied nobody in particular. He danced with everybody."

"Get out before I slaughter you," groaned my boss. "Here you are, the only reporter that was let in by Mrs. Whitelaw Reid and you have the cheek to tell me that the Prince fancied nobody."

"But it is true, sir."

"What is truth?" he thundered. "An item on page sixteen of the early city edition. Got the list of all the girls that were present?"

"Yes, sir."

"That's better. Now watch me."

He grabbed the list, closed his eyes and stuck his finger at a name.

"What is her name?" he asked.

"Millicent Rogers, sir."

"Good enough. The grand-daughter of John D's partner. Good enough even for the Prince of Wales."

The *Herald* appeared that night with a three-column headline on page one which read as follows :

*"THE PRINCE OF WALES ENTERTAINED BY  
MRS. WHITELOW REID. DANCES ALL  
NIGHT WITH MILLICENT ROGERS."*

At eight o'clock next morning my telephone started to ring : Colonel H. H. Rogers was in a great hurry to tell me that I was "the world's worst cad, bar none." He said many more things to me on that occasion—none suitable for the U.S. mails. I dressed hurriedly and rushed to the *Herald*.

"You have ruined my reputation," I said. "I want to resign. The Rogers' will never forgive me for what you have done."

"Don't be an ass," said my boss. "They'll probably send their chauffeur to buy 1,000 copies of to-day's *Herald*."

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I don't know whether they did or didn't ; but, even if they did, I can see, as I look at the whole episode from this distance, that Colonel Rogers was doubly right that morning. As a father he had to chastise me ; as a social leader it was surely his duty to make sure that his friends would see the *Herald's* headline. When one belongs to the best set in America, one can easily be right all of the time : it is simply a question of the proper town address and the capacity for not hearing the rumblings of a continent.

## ADDENDUM : THE TWO LISTS OF SOCIETY

*Contrary to popular belief, no attention whatsoever is paid by the leaders of Society to the names—the thousands of names—decorating the pages of the numerous social registers.*

*When a social leader prepares to give an elaborate party, she (or he) recognises the existence of just TWO lists. One, known as "The Backbone of American Society," includes seventy-five names. Another, entitled "The Outer Fringe of American Society," includes some one hundred and fifty odd names. The latter is truly remarkable because in it we find the majority of "headliners," revered by the newspapers and considered by the public-at-large as the veritable charmed circle of the sociallites.*

*I am giving herewith both lists as of 1929 and prior thereto. Where only one name (that of Mr. or Mrs.) is given, it means one of four things : bachelorhood, widowhood, a recent divorce (with the second party being "dropped" because of it) or the unwillingness of the second party (wife or husband) to take part in social life. The maiden names are in parentheses.*

WHEN DAY IS DONE

*The Backbone of American Society*

(the seventy-five people invited to all important functions)

MRS. CHARLES B. ALEXANDER (HARRIET CROCKER)

MR. AND MRS. W. VINCENT ASTOR (HELEN D. HUNTINGTON)

MR. ALBERT MORRIS BAGBY

MR. AND MRS. GEORGE F. BAKER, JR. (EDITH B. KANE)

MR. AND MRS. EDMUND L. BAYLIES (LOUISA VAN RENSSELAER)

MISS JULIA A. BERWIND

MR. LAWRENCE SMITH BUTLER

MR. AND MRS. HENRY GASSAWAY DAVIS 3rd (GRACE VANDERBILT)

MRS. REGINALD DE KOVEN (ANNA FARWELL)

MR. WILLIAM DE RHAM

MR. AND MRS. SNOWDEN A. FAHNESTOCK (HELEN M. MORAN)

MRS. E. MARSHALL FIELD (EVELYN MARSHALL)

MRS. HENRY CLAY FRICK (ADELAIDE H. CHILDS)

MR. AND MRS. DUDLEY PIERREPONT GILBERT  
(ADRIENNE M. ISELIN)

MR. CHARLES W. HANFORD

MR. CHARLES HAYDEN

MR. AND MRS. BARKLIE MCKEE HENRY (BARBARA WHITNEY)

MRS. BENJAMIN R. HOLCOMBE (MARGARET FAHNESTOCK)

MRS. C. OLIVER ISELIN (HOPE GODDARD)

MR. AND MRS. AYMAR JOHNSON (MARIAN K. HOFFMAN)

MRS. ADOLF LADENBURG (EMILY STEVENS)

MRS. JAMES F. D. LANIER (HARRIET A. BISHOP)

MR. AND MRS. OGDEN L. MILLS (DOROTHY RANDOLPH)

MISS ANNE MORGAN

MR. AND MRS. ALEX NELIDOW (DOROTHY GORDON KING)

MR. DE LANCEY NICOLL

MR. AND MRS. KENNETH O'BRIEN (KATHERINE MACKAY)



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MR. SCHUYLER L. PARSONS  
MRS. FRANCIS KEY PENDLETON (ELIZABETH LA  
MONTAGNE)  
MR. PERCEY R. PYNE  
MR. SIDNEY D. RIPLEY  
MRS. REGINALD B. RIVES (GABRIELLE WARREN)  
DUCHESS OF ROXBURGHE (MAY GOELET)  
MR. AND MRS. T. SHAW SAFE (HARRIET IVES GAMMELL)  
MR. AND MRS. A. COSTER SCHERMERHORN (RUTH  
FAHNESTOCK)  
GENERAL AND MRS. CHARLES SHERRILL (G. BARKER GIBBS)  
MRS. HERBERT SHIPMAN (JULIE F. BRADLEY)  
MRS. JAMES RUSSELL SOLEY (MARY HOWLAND)  
MR. AND MRS. WILLIAM RHINELANDER STEWART  
COUNT AND COUNTESS LASZLO SZECHENYI (GLADYS  
VANDERBILT)  
MR. AND MRS. LEONARD M. THOMAS (MARIE GOOD)  
MRS. RICHARD TRIMBLE (CORR RANDOLPH)  
MRS. HAMILTON MCK. TWOMBLY (FLORENCE A.  
VANDERBILT)  
MRS. JAMES LAURENS VAN ALLEN (MARGARET L. POST)  
MRS. VANDERBILT, SR. (ALICE GWYNNE)  
GENERAL AND MRS. CORNELIUS VANDERBILT (GRACE  
G. WILSON)  
MRS. GRAHAM FAIR VANDERBILT (VIRGINIA FAIR)  
SENATOR AND MRS. WILLIAM H. VANDERBILT (ANNE G.  
COLBY)  
MR. AND MRS. W. K. VANDERBILT  
MR. AND MRS. GEORGE HENRY WARREN (GEORGIA  
WILLIAMS)  
MR. G. CREIGHTON WEBB  
MISS EDITH WETMORE  
MRS. HENRY WHITE (EMILY T. VANDERBILT)  
MR. AND MRS. SHELDON WHITEHOUSE (MARY C.  
ALEXANDER)

## WHEN DAY IS DONE

MR. AND MRS. HARRY PAYNE WHITNEY (GERTRUDE VANDERBILT)

MRS. M. ORME WILSON (CAROLINE S. ASTOR)

MR. AND MRS. R. THORNTON WILSON (HARRIETTE A. POST)

MR. EGERTON L. WINTHROP

MR. AND MRS. WILLIAM WOODWARD (ELSIE O. CRYDER)

### *The Outer Fringe of American Society*

(The one hundred and fifty odd people recognised solely because of their immense wealth or political power or standing in the community. They are invited only to "larger" affairs, such as balls and charity bazaars. As a rule, they are always asked to come "after" dinner, not before.)

MR. CHESTER ALAN ARTHUR

MRS. JOHN TURNER ATTERBURY (ANNA D. ROBINS)

MRS. JAMES COX BRADY (HELEN McMAHON)

MR. AND MRS. CHESTER G. BURDEN (ELEANOR COTTON)

MR. AND MRS. GEORGE W. BURLEIGH (ISIS STOCKTON)

MR. AND MRS. G. MORRIS CARNOCHAN (SIBYLL B. BLISS)

MR. AND MRS. CLIFFORD N. CARVER (H. PHILAE MAXWELL)

MR. DRAYTON COCHRAN

MR. AND MRS. BARRON G. COLLIER (JULIET G. CARNES)

MR. AND MRS. JOSHUA S. COSDEN (ELEANOR NEVES)

MR. AND MRS. J. SERGEANT CRAM (EDITH C. BRYCE)

MR. FRANCIS W. CROWNSHIELD

BARON MAURICE VORUZ DE VAUX

MISS RUTH DRAPER

MR. AND MRS. C. HUNTINGTON ERHART (KATHERINE KENT)

MR. AND MRS. MAURICE FATIO (ELEANOR S. CHASE)

MR. AND MRS. WILLIAM GASTON (ROSAMOND M. PINCHOT)

MR. AND MRS. JAMES W. GERARD (MARY A. DALY)

MR. AND MRS. HAROLD H. GILE (CHARLOTTE S. KISSEL)

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- MR. AND MRS. ALEXANDER HAMILTON (KATHERINE COMLY)  
MR. AND MRS. PAUL L. HAMMOND (SUSAN R. SEDGWICK)  
DR. AND MRS. FORBES HAWKES (ALICE S. BELKNAP)  
MR. AND MRS. WILLIAM HAYWARD (S. MAE CADWELL)  
MR. AND MRS. FAY INGALLS (RACHEL C. HOLMES)  
MR. AND MRS. LEONARD JACOB 2nd. (ELEANOR S. WINSLOW)  
MR. F. FRAZIER JELKE  
MR. RUTGER BLEECKER JEWETT  
MR. AND MRS. LOUIS G. KAUFMAN (MARIE J. YOUNG)  
MR. AND MRS. HUGH G. M. KELLEHER (DOROTHY DUNCAN)  
MR. AND MRS. EDGAR W. LEONARD (ELIZABETH A. CANNON)  
MR. AND MRS. WILMARTH S. LEWIS (ANNIE BURR AUCHINCLOSS)  
LADY LISTER-KAYE (NATICA YZNAGA)  
MR. AND MRS. GROVER C. LOENING (MARGARET L. TRUESDALE)  
MR. AND MRS. LOUIS B. MCCAGG (KATHERINE G. WINSLOW)  
MR. AND MRS. CLARENCE H. MACKAY (ANNA CASE)  
MR. AND MRS. EDWARD ROSCOE MATHEWS (LOULIE SHAW ALBEE)  
SIR CHARLES AND LADY MENDEL (ELSIE DE WOLFE)  
MR. BRYCE METCALF  
COL. AND MRS. T. BENTLEY MOTT (GEORGETTE SAINT PAUL)  
MR. AND MRS. ECTOR O. MUNN (FERNANDA WANAMAKER, then MRS. DE HEEREN)  
MR. CONDE NAST  
MR. AND MRS. JULIUS W. NOYES (ROSITA TEXADA, then MRS. MCCALLUM)  
MR. AND MRS. ADOLPH S. OCHS (IPHIGENE M. WISE)  
PROF. H. FAIRFIELD OSBORN

## WHEN DAY IS DONE

- MR. AND MRS. LAWRENCE S. PARSONS (MARY F. TAPP)  
MR. AND MRS. ADOLF J. PAVENSTEDT (LILLIAN M.  
LANGHAM, then MRS. VON STERNBURG)  
MR. AND MRS. ALBERT S. ROBERTS (NATHALIE HARRISON)  
MR. JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER  
MR. AND MRS. JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER, JR. (ABBY G.  
ALDRICH)  
MRS. MARY B. ROGERS (MARY BENJAMIN)  
MR. HENRY H. ROGERS  
MRS. J. WEST ROOSEVELT (LAURA D'OREMIEULX)  
MR. AND MRS. ELIHU ROOT, JR. (ALIDA STRYKER)  
MR. CHARLES E. SAMPSON  
MR. AND MRS. KENNETH B. SCHLEY (ELLEN H. ROGERS)  
COUNT AND COUNTESS HERMANN SEHERR-THOSS (MURIEL  
WHITE)  
MR. AND MRS. NORRIE SELLAR (SYBIL W. SHERMAN, then  
MRS. HOFFMAN)  
MR. AND MRS. FINLEY J. SHEPARD (HELEN M. GOULD)  
MR. AND MRS. HORATIO SEYMOUR SHONNARD (SOPHIE A.  
MELDRIM, then MRS. COY)  
MR. AND MRS. H. NELSON SLATER (MARTHA BYERS LYON)  
MR. AND MRS. LOUIS STARR (KATHLEEN BAKER)  
MR. AND MRS. LOUIS W. STOTESBURY (HELEN M.  
TOMPKINS)  
MR. AND MRS. JOSEF STRANSKY (MARIE J. DOXRUD)  
MR. AND MRS. HERBERT BAYARD SWOPE (MARGARET H.  
POWELL)  
MRS. J. LEE-TAILER (MARIE STIRLING)  
MR. AND MRS. NEWELL W. TILTON (ELIZABETH A.  
MORTON, then MRS. BREESE)  
MR. AND MRS. E. TOD (KATHERINE A. CHEW)  
MRS. ELSIE MOORE TORLONIA (M. ELSIE MOORE)  
MR. AND MRS. JOHN HENRY TOWNE (ELEANOR SWENSON)  
MR. AND MRS. FREDERIC DE P. TOWNSEND, JR. (SUSAN  
BASS)

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- MR. AND MRS. S. OAKLEY VANDER POEL (MILDRED M. BARCLAY)  
MR. AND MRS. KILIAEN M. VAN RENSSELAER (ELIZABETH W. POST)  
MR. AND MRS. F. SKIDDY VON STADE (KATHERYN N. STEELE)  
MR. AND MRS. HUBERT VOS (ELEANOR K. CONEY, then MRS. GRAHAM)  
MR. AND MRS. WILLIAM G. WENDELL (RUTH APPLETON)  
MR. AND MRS. RICHARD WHARTON (HELENA J. PARSONS)  
MR. AND MRS. GUSTAVE J. S. WHITE (FRANCES C. JONES, then MRS. LITTLE, then MRS. KIP)  
MR. AND MRS. HARRISON WILLIAMS (MONA STRADER)  
MRS. FRANCES M. WOLCOTT (FRANCES E. METCALFE, then MRS. BASS)  
MR. AND MRS. GEORGE MUIRSON WOOLSEY (CHARLOTTE THROOP, then MRS. BOARDMAN)  
MR. GEORGE L. WRENN  
MRS. C. WICKLIFFE YULEE (ANNE P. MURRAY)

## CHAPTER FIVE

### AN OLD MUG

*The America's Cup - The pre-race negotiations - Why the crew is Swedish - Debunking the races - Sir Thomas Lipton - Newport manners.*

#### I

THIS IS THE STORY of a silver pitcher, of a common-place, clumsy, Victorian pitcher, wrought by the hand of a tasteless tyro. At an auction sale it would be knocked down for twenty dollars ; in a pawnshop it would fetch still less ; a connoisseur of art would declare it totally worthless. Yet its present owners would not exchange it for all the diamonds of South Africa. Some twenty-five million dollars were spent in the course of the last eighty-three years for the sake of keeping it in the City of New York, on the second floor of a sunless building in West Forty-Fourth Street, where it stands encased in glass and hidden from sight by a score of bald-headed gentlemen dozing over their afternoon papers.

The sunless building is the New York Yacht Club, the most exclusive club in the Western hemisphere,

## FAREWELL TO FIFTH AVENUE

and the ugly silver pitcher is America's Cup, the cherished trophy won by George L. Schuyler and his associates at Cowes, England, on the twenty-second day of August, one thousand eight hundred and fifty-one, and successfully defended since by this republic against fifteen sail-propelled foreign challengers.

I frankly admit that I would hesitate to refer to America's Cup as a "pitcher" in the presence of my father or my cousin, Harold. The former participated, to the tune of about one hundred thousand dollars each time, in the three syndicates that built the anti-Thomas Lipton crafts in 1903, 1920 and 1930; the latter sailed the winners in 1930 and 1934. To both of them, as to all men of their set and generation, America's Cup is as sacred as the Holy Grail, as awe-inspiring as the Springfield Memorial.

"Who is this fellow anyway?" asked my cousin Harold, pointing at me, when in the presence of Vincent Astor, I asked him a few, perhaps slightly too reportorial questions immediately after he had successfully defended the cup last September.

"Why, Harold," said Mr. Astor, "it's your cousin Neil."

"I don't believe it," said my cousin gravely. "No Vanderbilt could be so irreverent about the Cup."

## AN OLD MUG

He was taking his task and his victory in dead earnest. He was right, of course. All sports should be taken in dead earnest. Not much would be left of even football if the coach of the Harvard team began the season by explaining to the boys that the outcome of their game with Yale wouldn't make the slightest particle of difference to anyone in the world.

### 2

THE OUTCOME of the America's Cup Races seems to make a whole lot of difference to at least three nations. Two Canadians (in 1876 and 1881), eight Britishers (in 1870, 1871, 1885, 1886, 1887, 1893, 1895 and 1934) and one Irishman (the late Sir Thomas Lipton in 1899, 1901, 1903, 1920, and 1930) have built fifteen very costly sloops for the sole purpose of "lifting the old mug."

Considering that it costs not less than \$600,000 to build and maintain a sloop like T. O. M. Sopwith's *Endeavour*, so far the privilege of challenging the United States has set the British Empire back \$9,000,000. In the case of the defenders, the members of the New York Yacht Club, it took easily three times that much money to hold on to the Cup,



for the right of meeting the daring invader is usually disputed by at least three different crafts, built by the three competing syndicates. Last summer Harold Vanderbilt's *Rainbow*, Frederick H. Prince's *Weeta-moe* and Frank C. Paine's *Yankee* engaged in the trial races off Newport for six long weeks. Not before the very eve of September 15th (the day of the America's Cup races) did the learned judges of the New York Yacht Club announce the name of the worthy American defender and demote the other two sloops to the rank of \$600,000 failures. Only a football player dropped by his team on the morning of the big game can understand how it feels to be a \$600,000 failure, how a yachtsman grieves and sheds tears when he learns after a season of strenuous trials that his sloop is not good enough to be entrusted with the future of America's Cup. And the trials are strenuous, the preparations hectic.

To begin with, the moment the officers of the New York Yacht Club advise the members that they are in receipt of a ten months' notice from a challenging foreign Club, syndicates have to be organised and money raised. This usually happens in the month of November. For the following six weeks the gentlemen of affluence, whose names are household words throughout the United States, behave

like children about to play a prank on an unsuspecting governess. They gather in groups of three or four behind the locked doors of this or that Fifth Avenue mansion ; they speak in subdued voices as if surrounded by spies ; they plead with each other earnestly ; they bargain as to which one of them should subscribe the lion's share of the necessary \$600,000 ; they quarrel over the choice of designers and builders ; they get up and leave in a huff ; they accuse the competing syndicates of putting obstacles in the way of raising cash. If they are out of the trenches by Christmas, they are lucky. Many a syndicate that looked like a certainty around Thanksgiving Day turned out to be a cemetery of beautiful friendships by New Year's Day.

Between January 1st and April 15th (when the sloops are finally launched with befitting ceremony) there is small point in trying to talk politics, economics or art with the members of the syndicates. Even in their sleep they debate the advantages and handicaps of a duralumin mast. Even in their office hours—ticker or no ticker—they cast wistful glances through the window at the expanse of the harbour below, in the direction of Sandy Hook, beyond which, some thirty-two hundred nautical miles east, is to be found the cunning, the mysterious Mr.

## FAREWELL TO FIFTH AVENUE

Charles E. Nicholson who turned out Sir Thomas Lipton's last two *Shamrocks* and who outdid himself in the construction of T. O. M. Sopwith's *Endeavour*.

Comes the spring and then the real hardships begin. Not everyone who spits through his teeth and uses four-letter Saxon words is a sailor, and a syndicate cannot be too careful in selecting the members of the crew. No Americans need apply. Not that they are poor sailors but they are in the habit of talking back. No Yankee mariner has been let aboard an American defender since that tragic day when in the course of the final Cup race the head of the syndicate of owners was told by his native-born crew what they thought of his blankety-blank orders and where he could park his blankety-blank self. Three cheers for the Swedes ! They never talk back. They never say what they want to say. They merely think it.

The crew selected and installed aboard an auxiliary boat anchored side by side with another auxiliary boat occupied by the owners and sailing masters, the period of assiduous training comes. Some of the men are kept rowing heavy dinghies, the others are taken ashore twice a day and put through the routine of track-athletes. The list of don'ts is formidable : no smoking, no drinking, no starches,

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no sauces, no rich dressing, no women, no staying up after 9 p.m. In comparison with the régime enforced by the Cup Syndicates that of the U.S. Army is pampering. The six months spent by me in my early youth in preparation for the races aboard the good sloop *Aurora* filled my heart with an overflowing respect for the patience of the Swedes. Of such stuff are saints and vegetarians made. For myself I'd rather drive once more my pair of high-kicking, foul-tempered Army mules along the bumpy roads of South Carolina than help to keep the Old Mug in West Forty-Fourth Street. For one thing, there were no Narragansett squalls in South Carolina, and he who goes through life without trying to cut the sheets in the face of a Narragansett squall knows not what misery really means.

### 3

NOT UNLIKE the heavyweight championship fights, it is the feverish atmosphere around the contest rather than the contest itself which makes the America's Cup Races off Newport one of the grandest spectacles in Christendom.

Less than one per cent of the one hundred thousand people who journey to the famous Rhode

Island resort care about the technical points involved or even know that the race is reserved "for yachts in class J, not over seventy-six feet and over sixty-five, rating." The competition between W. Starling Burgess, America's foremost yacht-designer, and Charles E. Nicholson, England's answer to a challenger's prayer, escapes all but a few experts.

Were the crowds told that they are going to witness primarily a fight between two building principles—whether a sloop should be all-steel, including the mast (the British principle) or whether it should be steel-plated above the water, bronze below, with a duralumin mast (the American principle), the chances are they would stay at home.

Were the star-reporters assigned to cover Newport forced to memorise the infinitely complicated "Rules and Regulations of the America's Cup Races" beyond the mere fact that the Cup stays with the side that wins four races out of seven, it is a certainty that in the whole of the United States there would be no star-reporters qualified for the task.

The truth is that no laymen, even though armed with the most expensive and effective binoculars in the world, can grasp the fine points of a Cup Race or guess the identity of the sloop in the lead; no

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more than a soldier stuck in a trench somewhere near Verdun could have judged the relative merits of Foch and Ludendorff or foreseen the outcome of the second battle of the Marne. To the thousands of thrill-hungry people gathered on Ocean Drive in Newport and separated from the course of the race by fifteen miles of water, both sloops look alike, both captains are giving the same orders. The brilliance of Harold Vanderbilt's strategy in 1930—when his *Enterprise* won four races in a row—had to be explained to the reporters in a lengthy typewritten statement, point by point. Not before the evening papers appeared did the cheering crowds realise that the ease of the American victory in the third race was solely due to the fact that *Shamrock V* parted main halyard at masthead sheave when approaching the finish-line. As an old Newport cynic said on that occasion: "The America's Cup Races may be run off Newport but they should be watched from Times Square."

It is both amazing and revealing that the self-same Sir Thomas Lipton who spent a fortune on his five unsuccessful attempts to lift the old mug knew little if anything about the technicalities and routine of the races. He sailed none of his *Shamrocks*, satisfied to follow them on his huge steam-driven

yacht. He stared and blinked when asked whether his *Shamrock* was all-steel or steel-bronze duralumin. He openly confessed that he never tried so much as to read the formidable Rules and Regulations, jammed with such priceless gems of verbiage as "the quarter-beam length shall be measured in a line parallel with the middle fore and aft vertical plane, at a distance from it equal to one quarter of the load water-line breadth and one eighth of this breadth above the load water-line plane."

"Good old *Shamrock*, good old *Shamrock*, at last we've got you American chaps licked!" he cried on that memorable afternoon of September 18, 1930, seeing through his binoculars that one of the two sloops was gaining distance.

"Sorry to disagree with you, Sir Thomas," I said uneasily, "but it is my cousin's *Enterprise*, not your *Shamrock*."

"What rot! Impossible! How do you tell them apart?"

"It is easy enough to tell them apart if you take a good look at the mast."

"Oh," said Sir Thomas and dropped his binoculars. The next moment he was laughing. The truth was that he never expected to win the Cup, least of all in 1930 when the American defender was

sailed by a skipper of my cousin Harold's experience. He came to enjoy a good show and, incidentally, to promote his tea. The show was good and the sales of his tea did make a jump forward, so there was no reason for him to worry or feel disappointed. Knowing the snobbish Newport as well as he did, it amused him beyond words that the self-same members of the Reception Committee who never accepted him socially had to extend to him the official honours reserved by the Rules and Regulations for any and all challengers. As I bade him good-bye and shook his hand for the last time in my life, he said with a roguish smile :

"By the way, my boy, did it ever occur to you that you are the only Vanderbilt who came to see me socially, not as a representative of this or that Committee but as a free man? Is it because you like me or because you fancy my tea?"

"I love you both," I said, which was a lie. I never fancied his tea nearly so much as I liked the gay old codger. Mr. T. O. M. Sopwith is no doubt a better yachtsman and a more dangerous challenger but there will never be another Sir Thomas Lipton. A "shameless publicity seeker" and a "designing trader," in the estimation of Newport, he had something which few people possess : a keen



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sense of humour and a warm affectionate heart. If there is such a thing as yacht racing in the Great Beyond where he passed shortly after his 1930 débâcle in Newport, he must by now be chasing some celestial Cup. He was the only man I ever met who knew the secret of turning defeats into victories through the magic of a single smile.

### 4

NO CITY ON EARTH is as indifferent and as hostile toward outsiders as Newport. Thomas Lipton discovered it in 1899, 1901, 1903, 1920 and 1930, Mr. T. O. M. Sopwith in 1934. The latter expected a royal reception and got the Rhode Island version of the Bronx cheer. Just as Lipton was accused of promoting the sales of his tea, Sopwith was condemned because they said that he was fishing for knighthood in the waters of Narragansett Bay. Just as Lipton had to be satisfied with the company of reporters and autograph-seekers, Sopwith was left to himself, his wife, his British crew, a St. Louis, Mo. stock-jobber and an enterprising native gentleman who began by organising a Mammoth Anglo-American dinner and wound up by getting into trouble with the D.A.'s office.

"How does one get to know the people in Newport?" Sopwith asked a friend of mine who had spent two weeks calling up the houses along Bellevue Avenue and trying to scare up a decent party for the intrepid challenger.

My friend mumbled something to the effect that one is either born knowing those extraordinary people or dies without meeting them.

"But isn't there some place where a stranger can go and have a drink and listen to music in comfort?"

Yes, admitted my friend, there are lots of places like that—in Providence.

"But that's nearly two hours' drive. How about Newport itself?"

How about it? I am still wondering. The more I see of Newport and the America's Cup Races, the better I understand how Theodore Roosevelt felt when he begged his peaceful author friend Owen Wister to "smash the divorce-ridden, arrogant, preposterous Newport."

T. O. M. Sopwith limited his smashing to what is known in less exclusive circles as beefing. If I were Secretary of State, anxious to avoid a war with Great Britain, I would ask Congress to forbid the America's Cup Races. What I saw in the course of

the Harold Vanderbilt—T. O. M. Sopwith combat, what I witnessed the night of the last race, convinced me there is no such thing as sportsmanship, not at least between yachtsmen. There is no doubt whatsoever in my mind but that my cousin fouled his foe during the third race and if the latter did not go one better the following afternoon he would have been justified in doing so.

Then came the Night of Fisticuffs. Noses were broken, eyes blackened and cars flattened. Furniture was smashed and hostesses were sent into hysterics. Reserves were called out and dignified butlers taxed to the last ounce of their strength. All because a few reckless young men, making their rounds of Newport, thought that the American defender should have been disqualified right after the third race.

Whatever it is that should have been done right after the third race, the night of the last race tore the mask off Newport's face. It is an ugly, mean face. A Tenth Avenue bouncer would hesitate before risking his fist against its hardness.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE TALE OF THE "NORTH STAR "

*The "North Star" (1894-1914) - Aboard the Kaiser's Yacht - Two young Vanderbilts' opinion of Wilhelm II - A visit from Edward VII - George V - J. P. Morgan - Signor Marconi - The "North Star" accepts the end of the world - After the Armistice - Sir Basil Zaharoff - H.M.S. "Hellas" - "No cheques, no I.O.U.'s, nothing but cash!"*

#### I

SHE WAS FORTY LAST FALL and she shows it. Had she remained where she belongs, commuting between New York and Newport, Cowes and Kiel, Biarritz and San Sebastian, the broadness of her heavy bulk could have passed for a dignity too proud to compromise with fashion. As it is, she has no excuse. One does follow the styles in the Port of Hongkong where dignity is reserved for the Chinese and smartness is the passport of the whites. Looking at her shabby coat of faded, muddy brown, the old skippers shake their heads, sigh dejectedly and say in the tones in which we talk about a former beauty reduced to dishwashing : " Too bad. . . . She was a

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fine craft. . . . Remember how she won the Cup in 1907 ? ”

And so she was a fine craft—two hundred and seventy feet long, forty-nine feet wide, steam-driven, ocean-going, manned by a crew of thirty-six. And so she did win the Cup in 1907 and the many other Cups offered by the King of England, the Czar of Russia, the Emperor of Austria and the King of Spain in the years when Europe’s sovereigns were still offering things, during her twenty summers of service in the Vanderbilt family.

She was known then, in 1894-1914, as the *North Star*, christened in honour of her predecessor, the first privately owned American steam-yacht built for Commodore Vanderbilt in 1851. Whatever it was that the old Commodore liked about the stars, his descendants back in the 1890’s were still cherishing that certain vague something as jealously as the Morgans were and are the memory of their legendary forebear, the daring raider of the Caribbean. It may be significant that while the Vanderbilts have switched since toward other, less meaningful names (*Winchester, Alva, Vedette*, etc.), the Morgans have kept the *Corsair* in the family.

No mere pleasure yacht was the *North Star*. The martinet of American Society, she led that peculiar

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existence, a mixture of pageantry and lonesomeness, which is so characteristic of all martinets.

"Do not forget," she seemed to warn her non-titled guests, "that right here in this dining-room where you are eating your pea-soup now, their Imperial Majesties Kaiser Wilhelm II and Czar Nicholas II deigned to partake of a piece of roast duckling but two short months ago."

They never forgot. They talked in subdued voices. They stared at the many autographed royal portraits on the walls. They finished their meal hurriedly. They turned in for the night at the stroke of ten. And although food and liquor were invariably good, somehow one cannot have much appetite aboard a floating museum. And although the guest-cabins were quite comfortable, somehow one would rather sleep in a bed not stuffed with the memories of the Dowager-Queen of England and the last Empress of Austria.

Very often, when the *North Star* returned from Newport on Sunday and reached the pier of the New York Yacht Club around midnight, there would be sounds of music and popping corks and laughter coming from the right and left of her.

"What is that noise, Commodore?" the guests would ask, assuming an air of disinterested

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detachment. My father was twice Commodore of the Yacht Club.

"That Chicago packer is giving one of his famous poker parties again."

A poker party? On Sunday?

"Big stakes, Commodore?"

"The smallest chip stands for one thousand dollars."

"How vulgar." The guests looked wistfully in the direction of the gaily lighted yacht.

Aboard the *North Star* they played bridge and dominoes. Bridge for one twentieth of a cent a point, dominoes for ten cents a game, such being the stakes approved of by the stern Hofmeister of the Imperial Court at Potsdam.

## 2

POPPING CORKS, moaning saxophones, one-thousand dollar white chips. . . . While at home, in the American territorial waters, the *North Star* felt ill at ease, perhaps embarrassed by the behaviour of the other yachts. Life, as she understood it, began at the moment when on entering the port of Kiel up went her ensign, and her steam-launch, lowered instantaneously and noiselessly, shot across the glossy

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waters carrying greetings from her owners to the well-known skipper of H.I.M.S. *Hohenzollern*. Five minutes later it was the turn of the Kaiser's yacht to lower its steam-launch.

"His Imperial Majesty thanks Mr. and Mrs. Vanderbilt and wishes to inform them that they are invited to come aboard."

Clicking of heels, bows from the waist, barking sounds of German orders, and in another five minutes the owners of the *North Star*—a man in a double-breasted sack coat of blue cloth, a woman in a large picture hat and two children in ermine-trimmed mantles—were on their way to pay their personal, undelegated respect to Their Germanic Majesties.

Always a mariner, the Kaiser invariably managed to crowd within the short space of a twenty-minute visit enough nautical terms to assure the happy old age of the entire corps of retired American admirals.

"Topsail . . . Mizzen-sail . . . Spinnaker boom . . . Jib-headed mainsail . . . The tables of scantlings . . . Load water-line plane . . ."

Dressed in the uniform of Commodore of the German Imperial Yacht Club (five stripes of heavy mohair tubular braid on the sleeve), he talked in



rapid-fire Oxonian but his intonations were Prussian : stacatto, drum-like, challenging.

Sir Thomas Lipton is about to try for the America Cup again? Yes, yes, of course, he has heard of it. How can one help hearing such things when that ridiculous Irish grocer is infesting the whole world with his propaganda.

"But he is quite a sportsman, is Sir Thomas, Your Majesty."

A sportsman? The very idea! A grocer—a sportsman! *Sir Thomas* . . . If only "some people" would realise how humiliating it is for the real aristocracy to behold the appalling spectacle of a baronet-grocer. . . .

After a short silence, having thoroughly enjoyed the embarrassment of his guests, the skipper of H.I.M.S. *Hohenzollern* would plunge again into the nautical dictionary.

"The New York Yacht Club should revise the rules governing the races for the America Cup. There should be just one race instead of three. . . . Just one equilateral triangular race of twenty nautical miles to windward and return. . . . The competing yachts should not be less than eighty feet instead of the present sixty-five . . ." etc., etc.

The question of the racing rules settled, the fiscal

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policies of the American Government analysed and the American railroads rebuilt—all of this in slightly less than twenty minutes—the Kaiser usually inquired about the *North Star*. How long did it take her this time to cross the Atlantic? Fifteen days? Ought to do much better than that. Something must be wrong with her engines. He might take a look at them. It wouldn't be difficult for him to put his finger right on the trouble.

A two-minute speech on the excellence of the new German engines. . . . A wealth of technical terms. . . . A deprecating remark about that biggest "turtle afloat"—H.M.S. *Victoria and Albert*. . . . A benign acceptance of the invitation to dinner. . . .

Back aboard the *North Star*, the two grown-ups beamed, the two children sighed. To the grown-ups their Imperial friend was the Number Two Man under the sun, second in importance only to the King of England. To the children he was a personage from Wonderland, second in rampant eccentricity only to the Mad Hatter. To the grown-ups a dinner given for Kaiser Wilhelm II meant the possibility of displaying the Imperial pennant on the foremast of the *North Star* and a flattering paragraph in the Court Circular ; to the children it meant that they would have to eat in silence and would not be

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permitted to dash about the promenade deck. The grown-ups were as aristocratic as the *North Star* herself ; the children were as common as the *North Star Weekly*, a paper printed by them on a diminutive hectograph. Fortunately for the reputation and the mental peace of the *North Star*, the weekly bearing her noble name came to an ignominious end on the day when Mrs. Vanderbilt discovered that Cornelius Vanderbilt Jr. ("Editor and Publisher") and Grace Vanderbilt ("Circulation Manager") were selling their disgraceful sheet for three pennies a copy to the captain, the officers, the crew and the guests. The perusal of the few remaining copies of that short-lived publication discloses the fact that the American tabloid style was born in the port of Kiel, in the year of grace 1912, during the week of the Kaiser's Regatta.

"The Empress of Germany," reads one of its paragraphs, "must weigh at least sixty pounds more than her husband. She is as big as our former wet nurse."

"The Kaiser," reads the description of a meal aboard H.I.M.S. *Hohenzollern*, "cuts turkey much better than our cook in Newport. But it takes him longer. Because of his crippled right hand, he cuts the bird with his left, with the aid of a curious

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instrument which is a combination of a long fork and a carving knife. He serves himself first and the moment he finishes eating the footmen take away everybody's plates. We felt hungry after dinner and Neil said he wished he could ask for a glass of milk."

### 3

IN THE beginning of August—her bath-pipes still filled with the greenish water of the Baltic—another exalted pennant would be hoisted on the foremast of the *North Star*, the pennant of His Britannic Majesty who never failed to preside over the Cowes Regatta.

No clicking of heels on this occasion. No bows from the waist. Even the French cook suddenly acquired very broad "a's" and talked with that suave informality, cheerful and yet drawing the line, which was the very soul of the Edwardian etiquette. Even the exchange of lightning visits between the two steam-launches, although following the same rigorous routine, struck a note of sunny friendliness at Cowes. The flag officer of the *Victoria and Albert* and the flag officer of the *North Star* shook hands in the hearty fashion befitting two Britishers who, while working for two vastly

different employers, recognised that given a British crew even an American yacht could qualify for the inner circle of sea-loving royalty. Formalities over, they chatted confidentially of this and that. Mr. Vanderbilt's flag officer related what he saw aboard the *Hohenzollern*. King Edward's flag officer reciprocated with a word of praise for the seaworthiness of the *North Star*. Both felt happy. One was proud to represent a craft that had won His Britannic Majesty's Cup ; the other appreciated the chance of passing over to his Master the latest bit of gossip about " nephew Willie." And when an hour later, a bearded fat, elderly man wearing a blue sack coat and white trousers creased on the side, settled his huge frame in a wicker chair on the deck of the *North Star*, everyone smiled contentedly and everyone thought : " What a difference between uncle and nephew ! Fancy the Kaiser joking with the stewards or shaking hands with the petty officers." King Edward did all of that, possibly because he sincerely liked doing it, probably because even a sovereign feels obliged to live up to the popular conception of his personality. When, grinning broadly and pulling at his laboriously trimmed beard, he said : " And the children ? Do they know their American history well ? Do they remember the

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name of the cow that burned the whole city of Chicago?"—the children stepped forward and joined in the King's roaring laughter. They knew nothing about Chicago or Mrs. O'Leary's cow but after four weeks spent in deadly fear lest their behaviour should offend the Kaiser, the task of pleasing Great Britain's ruler was extremely easy. The moment they saw that he was about to laugh, they began to laugh too. The fact that the King was the only man they had ever met who had his trousers creased on the side puzzled the children considerably. Every year they promised each other they would dare to ask him for an explanation the next summer but they never did.

When in the summer of 1912 another King, a younger and a thinner King, came aboard the *North Star*, his trousers were creased in the centre and he displayed no interest in the children or the possibility of their acquaintance with Mrs. O'Leary's cow. What would have made Edward VII roar for several minutes, brought a mere shadow of a smile to the face of George V who resembled very much the third honoured guest of the *North Star*—the none-too-gay Czar of Russia. Both seemed shy and subdued. Both had a habit of tugging nervously at their sleeves. Both smoked incessantly. Both could

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spend hours listening to the explanation of a new piece of machinery but never asked so much as a single question about New York Society, American politics or Wall Street—the three favourite topics of King Edward VII who knew and met more Wall Street bankers than a South American President in search of cash, more Fifth Avenue beauties than the oldest dressmaker of Manhattan. The difference between the British and the Russian crowned cousins, almost indiscernible to outsiders, was very plain to the Captain of the *North Star*. When in Russian territorial waters, preparing for the visit of the Czar, he felt not unlike the commander of a besieged fortress and could not sleep a wink for fear that somehow and in some way the revolutionaries would succeed in planting a bomb in the dining saloon or a charge of dynamite in the engines. The tension was great but the result well worth the effort : no other American yacht displayed so many royal pennants on its foremast, no other American yacht spent so little time in America.

### 4

NOT that the *North Star* was opposed to the democracy, but her pleasant summers in Norway, Germany, Russia, England and Spain had taught her

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that good American commoners went to shoot grouse in Scotland and died on the French Riviera while the mediocre ones fished off the coast of Maine and drew the last breath of life to the accompaniment of elevated trains. There were commoners and commoners, to be sure, just as there were yachts and yachts. Among the yachts her favourite was the *Corsair*, flying the pennant of Mr. J. P. Morgan ; among the commoners Signor Guglielmo Marconi, the silent and sad parent of the noisiest gaiety in the world. Both gentlemen were commoners with a difference. Mr. Morgan talked figures, big enough figures to eclipse the impressiveness of the German naval budget. Signor Marconi brought along, the very first time he came aboard, a set of gadgets, sufficiently small gadgets to make his miracle appear like the dramatisation of a page out of the New Testament. The choice between the big figures and the small gadgets was not easy, and while it seemed at the time as if the U.S. Steel Corporation were a more substantial venture than wireless telegraphy, it was nevertheless the proudest moment in the career of the *North Star* when her owner said he was inclined to help finance Signor Marconi. Coming on the heels of a brilliant season in San Sebastian and Newport, the Marconi interlude added a



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certain spiritual halo to that life of sustained harmony. It brought back the days of Queen Isabella and Christopher Columbus ; it sounded like a magnificent resurgam of the Medicis and Leonardo. It made one realise that everything was as it should be in this best of possible worlds.

Nineteen Twelve—the year of Roosevelt's Square Deal, the Bull Moose Movement and Woodrow Wilson—brought still more joy to the *North Star* : King George V deemed it advisable to donate a cup “ to be held by the New York Yacht Club ” and “ to be sailed for annually.” On a hot and sticky July night of that year when the whole world was waiting for the news from Chicago where one hundred and eight delegates pledged to Theodore Roosevelt had walked out of the Republican National Convention, thus assuring Wilson's election and the defeat of Europe's traditional arbiter, the *North Star* was watching, awe-stricken and breathless, the signing of a declaration which said : “ Any yacht belonging to any yacht club in the United States in good standing shall be eligible to enter in these races for the King's Cup, provided that, in the case of a single-masted vessel, she shall be of water-line length of not less than fifty feet, and that, in the case of a vessel of more than one

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mast, she shall be of a water-line length of not less than sixty feet, these limitations of dimension to be from time to time altered by the unanimous action of the Flag Officers of the New York Yacht Club taken not less than ten months prior to the race to which such alterations shall be applicable."

Two months later the King's Cup was won by E. Trowbridge Hall's *Winsom* in a style fully justifying the confidence of the King and the efforts of the *North Star*. Wilson or Taft, life was beautiful and the future cloudless.

## 5

WHEN THE END OF THE WORLD CAME, the *North Star* accepted it in an orderly manner. Next to Arthur Balfour, who greeted the news of the declaration of war with the words—"Oh, dear, dear, what a bore!" she was the least perturbed unit of international society. It was annoying to think that both the Cowes Regatta and the New York Yacht Club's races for the King's Cup would have to be called off but the thing to do was to keep cool and let the excited mob have its innings. She was anchored outside Southampton on the night His Britannic Majesty's Government decided to make good their

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promises to France and at seven o'clock of the following morning a Code Flag marked "C I" ("Boat will be sent for you") was hoisted under her ensign. This invitation, graceful and voluntary, was extended to the two representatives of the British Red Cross, baronets and lovers of fine yachts, who had inquired the day before whether there was a chance of turning the *North Star* into an auxiliary floating hospital. They came, the two tall men in rough tweeds, and were shown through the salons, the masters' and the guests' cabins and the quarters reserved for officers and crew. They nodded approvingly. It was just a question of removing a partition here and there, of replacing the heavy antique furniture in the dining saloon with the paraphernalia necessary for the surgeons. Men of experience and dispatch, they saw at once that the study where the Kaiser used to harangue his audience on the Yellow Peril could be turned into the X-ray den and the ballroom into a ward large enough to accommodate twelve beds.

"This stuff will have to go," they added apologetically, pointing to the autographed pictures of the German and Austrian Imperial Families. "We cannot depend on the self-control of the wounded men, don't you see."

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The whole thing—including sherry-and-bitters and a short chat about the relative merits of one- and two-masted yachts—was accomplished in half an hour. By nine o'clock the personal baggage of the owners and the autographed portraits of royalty had been packed and set ashore. At 9.15 the Vanderbilt family took their places in the steam-launch, the motor roared, and a code flag marked " G T " (" Wish you a pleasant voyage ") was hoisted under the ensign of the *North Star* to the accompaniment of " For He's A Jolly Good Fellow " sung by the eighty-six members of the all-British Naval crew. No tears were shed, no speeches made. Everyone realised that the War was just another interlude and that the reunion would take place not later than the following spring, in time for the Midnight Sun Cruise in the Norwegian fjords. The *North Star* was only twenty years old and although the newer yachts were being built along narrower, torpedo-like lines, it was obvious even to her kitchen help that not unlike Queen Mary's hats she represented the triumph of history over fashion.

" His Majesty's Government," said the British Admiralty, " will see to it that no undue harm, except that due to a *force majeure*, is done to this beautiful boat so generously offered by the owners

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for the uses of the Red Cross. Every effort will be made to have it returned after the expiration of hostilities in as exemplary a condition as it was received in."

### 6

"EVERY EFFORT" was made—both by the British Admiralty and the German, by the former to watch over the welfare of Mr. Vanderbilt's gift, by the latter to sink it in the muddy waters of the Channel. War was still in its infancy when the commander of a German submarine, a former officer of the *Hohen-zollern*, tried to torpedo the craft known to him for the excellence of its cold suppers ; and the *North Star* returned his compliment by firing at the flag she had saluted for twenty consecutive summers. What began as an interlude was turning into a brawl. The *North Star* felt puzzled : even the all-covering rules of the British Royal Yacht Squadron made no provision for the emergency in which a craft flying the pennant of the Emperor of Germany (the Club's honorary member) would assault, with intent to kill, a craft belonging to a fellow member. The obvious thing to do was to strike the culprit's name off the roster and deprive him and his friends of the

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club-house privileges. This was done. "A war's a war and a fool's a fool and all that sort of rot," said Mr. Arthur Balfour, "but a chap should not go around sinking the auxiliary floating hospitals," to which dignified remark the Kaiser answered by making it public that most of the British "auxiliary floating hospitals" were carrying guns and evidently under-studying the submarine chasers.

The dispute went on. It continued for the duration of the war. As far as the *North Star* was concerned, it led to two huge holes in her starboard and a total change in her make-up. A heartbroken Sister of Charity in 1914-1915, she became a shell-shocked, weather-beaten submarine chaser immediately after the sinking of the *Lusitania*. This necessitated the removal of the last reminders of her complacent existence in Cowes and San Sebastian: her open-air café where King Edward VII sat in his white, side-creased trousers was allotted to a battery of six-inch guns, and her hot-house boasting of the finest orchids and roses afloat gave way to the powder magazine. The fragrance of flowers—the smell of iodoform—the heavy fumes of gun-powder. . . . Drama was there but the *North Star* was brought up in a school that preferred drawing-room comedy. Were she capable of a critical

analysis, she might have understood that it was altogether just and logical that she who had been the martinet of Society in the years of peace should become Society's death-dealing weapon in the years of war. But none of her generation was capable of a critical analysis, only of preaching virtue to the poor. They thought of war in terms of knighthoods bestowed by Emperors and decorations distributed by field-m Marshals. They overlooked the lice, the stink, the rats and the mud. And they wound up—humans with a bayonet in the belly, yachts with a shell-hole in the starboard.

## 7

LIKE SO MANY OTHER pre-war celebrities—empires, Prime Ministers and sages—the *North Star* found it difficult to adjust herself to the cacophony of morals, ideas and habits ushered in by the Armistice. The truth was that no one wanted her. She was a ghost, a tragic if blue-blooded ghost, suggestive of all that people were trying to drown in wine, dope and noisy music. The British Admiralty thought she should be returned to the Vanderbilts. The latter insisted they had given their yacht for good to the United Kingdom. Not only would it have taken every cent of

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half a million dollars to put the old martinet of Society in order, but the very thought of eating again in the room where the Czar had dined in state and thousands of limbs had been amputated, sounded almost ghoulish. Refusing to take back their yacht, the Vanderbilts felt as their fellow-Americans did when they voted for "normalcy," as the Germans did when they junked Ludendorff, as the French did when they defeated Clemenceau for the Presidency.

"A most unusual situation," said the British Admiralty. "There must surely be someone desirous of possessing one of the finest yachts ever built." They were right, as usual. Someone came forth. He turned out to be King Constantine of Greece, poor in cash but rich in the friendship of Sir Basil Zaharoff, a Greek born in Russia, brought up in Turkey, knighted by Great Britain, made prosperous by his munition plants throughout the world and dreaming of the restoration of the ancient Byzantine Empire. After a life spent in selling machine-guns, shrapnel and rifles, Sir Basil was immune to the smell of iodoform and the memories of assassinated sovereigns. It seemed to him only appropriate that the future Ruler of the Byzantine Empire should hoist his pennant on a yacht that



had housed the crowned heads of Europe and the industrial dictators of America. He knew of no nightmare of the past that could not be white-washed and beautified by an army of interior decorators, painters and carpenters. And so, much to the delight of the British Admiralty, the *North Star* left her berth in the dry-docks of Liverpool and started on her way to Athens. From now on she was to be known as H.M.S. *Hellas* and to serve as floating headquarters of the would-be Byzantine Empire. Thoroughly renovated and thickly perfumed, she was ready to receive a score of Balkanic royalty who came aboard to wish good luck to her new owner. For the following six months she had no reason to regret the change of scenery. A royal pennant hoisted on her foremast, a king or two ever present in her study, the one-hundred-and-one-gun salute welcoming her appearances along the coast of Greece—all was as it should be in a household financed by a fabulously rich munitions magnate. Then things began to happen. It appeared that an uncouth fellow by the name of Mustafa Kemal had gathered together the remnants of the Turkish army and was bent on expelling the owner of H.M.S. *Hellas* from Asia Minor.

“He can’t get away with it,” said Sir Basil

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Zaharoff. "His action is a daring challenge to the crystal-clear terms of both the Versailles and Sèvres Treaties."

Everyone agreed with Sir Basil, everyone with the exception of Mustafa Kemal who continued his triumphant march through Asia Minor and slaughtered Greeks as if he had never heard of either one of the two great Treaties.

On the day King Constantine's army was routed by the Turks in a battle which was supposed to prove the invincible supremacy of Greek strategy, three gentlemen wearing silk hats, morning coats and striped trousers were announced by the stately major-domo of H.M.S. *Hellas*. Invited to partake of some fine old sherry in the study, they smiled sheepishly and said they were in a hurry. The Governments of France, Great Britain and Italy instructed them to advise His Hellenic Majesty to abdicate in favour of his son Alexander.

"It is only our advice, mind you," they explained. "If His Majesty prefers to remain and face his enraged subjects . . ."

"I will take your advice," said the King, a man of extreme intelligence and wide acquaintance with Russian history.

His civilian clothes being always kept aboard, he

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was able to clear out of the harbour of Piræus some twenty minutes before the mob broke into his palace in Athens. When H.M.S. *Hellas* returned to Greece a week later to be transferred to the youthful King Alexander, there was nothing left in her salons or the cabins to remind the world of King Constantine : all portraits were torn off the walls and all personal souvenirs removed. The new régime was marked by an extreme frugality and a strange tenant appeared aboard the royal yacht—a diminutive, red-eyed monkey. It was a nasty, bad-mannered animal. It pulled the long white beard of the Prime Minister, it made faces at the British Ambassador and it bit anyone who tried to interfere with its frolics. The King adored it. “ The only friend I’ve got,” he used to say when the monkey tore up the state documents or threw the ink-well at an aide-de-camp. He even let it bite his own fingers, with the result that one morning he woke up with his hand swollen and running a temperature of 104. By afternoon he was delirious. Three days later, the Captain of H.M.S. *Hellas* received orders to lower the pennant to half-mast. The old skippers shook their heads knowingly : the yacht was hoodooed ; King Alexander was the third sovereign she had housed to die suddenly and tragically.

ONCE MORE—they like return engagements in Athens—King Constantine hung his civilian clothes in the spacious closets of the Vanderbilts' floating mansion. Why a man of his seasoned judgment should have listened to the flattery of repenting politicians will remain a mystery. Perhaps he came back moved by the same odd curiosity which makes us touch the wall marked "fresh paint." He did not stay in Greece long this time, just long enough to see himself pictured on the cover of a popular local magazine shaking hands with a diminutive monkey and saying, "Thanks, old sport. I'll do the same for you some day."

In 1921 His Hellenic Majesty was chased away by the advancing hordes of Mustafa Kemal ; in 1923 by the unfavourable results of parliamentary elections. Following the well-established tradition, he abdicated again aboard his yacht ; only on this occasion he preferred to accept the services of a British destroyer, and H.M.S. *Hellas* remained in Greece, the prey of the triumphant revolutionary government who sold her shortly afterward to a gambling syndicate.

For the fifth time she saw an army of carpenters

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attacking her salons and cabins. For the fifth time she was to change her itinerary and guests. She had never cruised off the coast of Egypt before and it was a distinct shock for her to watch her new owners swarthy, black-haired men with much jewellery on their persons—preside over the green-cloth tables and shriek incessantly: "No cheques, no I.O.U.'s, nothing but cash!" She who had frowned at the vulgarity of Chicago packers and Wall Street brokers had to extend her hospitality now to gaily painted ladies who swore at their escorts and pulled each other's hair. She who had been the friend of Kings and the winner of His Germanic Majesty's Cup, had to hoist a welcoming code flag at the sight of a launch laden with sharp-eyed professional gamblers and drunken rug vendors. She who had been permitted to drop her anchor at Cowes in close proximity to the *Victoria and Albert* had to be afraid of the native Egyptian Police and the Syrian detectives.

It seemed impossible that anyone—a human or a yacht—could fall lower still but there is such a thing as the triple bottom in the Orient. One day, three years after the ex-*North Star* had been sold by the Greek Government to the gambling syndicate, something happened to the reliable roulette-wheel

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in her main hall (scarcely recognisable as the former dining-room of the Vanderbilts) and it refused to perform its usual miracles for the owners. The syndicate lost every cent of its hard-earned capital, to a Chinaman of all people.

"How about giving us another chance?" asked the elder of the swarthy, black-haired men.

"No cheques, no I.O.U.'s, nothing but cash," grinned the Chinaman.

"But we've still got the boat."

They lost it before dawn.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE BIG SIX

*The Big Six - Mr. Hoover and the Mississippi flood - An unguarded moment - An audience with the Holy Father - Il Duce - The truth about the Smedley Butler episode - Stalin, the perfect Dictator - A little talk with Al Capone - Hitler at the zenith - Hanfstaengl - Three generations of Hohenzollerns - How to interview Hitler at \$5,000 per.*

#### I

ONLY A THOROUGHLY MAD ARTIST would think of painting them on the same canvas. Only the sacrilegious frenzy of the Great Depression dared to group together, on the same front page, His Holiness the Pope, the President of the United States, the three Strong Men of Europe and America's worst criminal. The offence was grave but so was the Crisis. The names of Pius XI, Herbert Hoover, Joseph Stalin, Benito Mussolini, Adolph Hitler and Al Capone set in the same type, in letters of equal magnitude, bore witness to the infinitely complicated workings of the world's despair. Two of them are retired by now, retired by the Storm. Four remain. It is a certainty that



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none of the six contestants has ever been what the popular fancy pictured him to be. There was more statesmanship in the Vatican than in the White House, more "imperial thinking" in the Kremlin than in the Palazzo Chiggi, more showmanship in the Hotel Lexington in Chicago than in the Nazi Headquarters in Berlin.

Thanks to a series of fortunate coincidences, I met every one of the Big Six at a moment of climax when no "statements" were being issued, when words expressed, not disguised, the thoughts. I was received by the Holy Father on the eve of the Vatican's greatest victory. I came to know Herbert Hoover in the tense weeks of the Mississippi Flood. I listened to Stalin when the Five-Year Plan was still the bugaboo of the western world. I drove with Mussolini across the lavender valleys of Lombardy the week-end he rehearsed for the first time the rôle of Europe's two-fisted Peace Maker. I hung on to Adolph Hitler's brown sleeve the night he removed President Hindenburg to a sound-proof vault in the Hall of Fame. And I talked beer, rye, rackets and American politics with Al Capone barely a month before his dethronement by the U.S. Collector of Internal Revenue.

THE MISSISSIPPI FLOOD was six weeks old, and the official in charge of Secretary Hoover's special train made it clear that I had overstayed my welcome aboard by just six weeks. In vain did I plead that, a mere reporter, I could not be held responsible for the editorial pronouncements of my employers.

"Is it my fault that my boss does not like Mr. Hoover and suspects him of building a political machine throughout the South while helping the homeless farmers of Tennessee and Louisiana?"

That was logic, I thought. That was the Draft-Coolidge-Movement, suspected the official-in-charge.

"I am tired of your excuses," he said when the special train was about to leave Memphis for Louisiana. "The mere fact that Mr. Hoover is a member of the Cabinet and a potential nominee of the Republican Party should entitle him to respectful treatment by the papers. I would thank you to spare me the unpleasant task of ejecting you by force."

"You mean to say that you would dare to leave millions of our readers without news about the Mississippi Flood?"

"I mean to say that you will find your bags on the platform. From now on your boss will have to be satisfied with the Associated Press dispatches. There is nothing in the Constitution of the United States compelling the Secretary of Commerce to extend the hospitality of his train to special correspondents."

He won : the husky Marines were taking his orders, not mine.

New York, notified of the occurrence by a frantic long distance call from the Memphis railroad station, was equally emphatic.

"Marines or no Marines," said the boss, "you will either be aboard that train or lose your job. How are you going to do it? Who cares? Shoot your way aboard, if necessary. And don't try to reverse the charges. Good-bye!"

Just then the whistle of the Special blew. I dropped the receiver, dashed out of the booth, ignoring the yells of the non-paid telephone operator and galloped through the waiting-room and along the platform lined with Marines. The train was moving slowly and I could see the grinning faces of the Red Cross workers watching me through the windows. It made me fighting-mad. I had no plan. I was running not because I expected

to follow the Special all the way to Louisiana but because I had to do something. I reached the end of the platform a split-second ahead of the locomotive and then I did what could easily have cost me both life and job. I leaped high in the air, grabbed a rung of the engine's side-ladder and hung on to it with all my might. Never much of an athlete, less still of an acrobat, I was terrified by my own daring. I felt certain the end was at hand but I did not care : to be crushed under the wheels of that train was better than not to try to be aboard it. Mr. George Ackerson, Herbert Hoover's private secretary, told me afterwards that the ultimate success or failure of my *salto mortale* depended not so much on my ability to maintain my balance on the greasy rung of that narrow ladder as on the mood of the Special's engineer. The latter could have ("should have," said Mr. Ackerson sternly) mistaken me for an anarchist and used the gun given to him for just such an emergency. As it was, the engineer (may he live to be one hundred and fifty !) thought I belonged to the Secret Service detail. "Only a plain-clothes dick can be that much of a damn fool," was his greeting when on stopping the train some thirty miles outside Memphis he let me in and explained how I could get into the Secretary's

salon through the baggage car and the diner. I did not contradict him. My hands bleeding, my trousers torn, my face covered with a thick layer of cinders and gnats, I presented such a pitiable sight that even the official-in-charge had no heart to eject me for the second time. As a result of his interference I was not only permitted to stay aboard but given a pair of pyjamas and invited to sit at the same table with Secretary Hoover and Dwight W. Davis (then the Secretary of War in Coolidge's Cabinet).

The meal passed in silence. As is his habit whenever in the company of comparative strangers, Hoover sat with his eyes dropped, his jaw set, his fingers tapping the table, never volunteering a remark and answering all questions with "Yes," "No" or "I wouldn't know that." Looking at his pudgy face of an overgrown, fat boy, I thought of what Coolidge said to me once after a luncheon in the White House attended by his celebrated Secretary of Commerce: "Next to Mr. Hoover I am a chatterer. I reckon someone told him that a miracle worker must keep his mouth shut in order to conform to type."

I remember trying my very best to make the conversation interesting for my host. I mentioned his popularity in Europe. I speculated on the future

of the inter-allied debts. I praised the work of the Department of Commerce. I finally quoted the opinion of some specialists in Holland, the world's greatest experts on floods, who claimed that it was utterly impossible to predict the break of a dam even an hour in advance.

"That is not true," he said, without raising his eyes from the plate (his first "long" remark during the entire dinner). "It wouldn't take much of a prophet, for example, to predict that no dam is going to break, not for at least a week, within a radius of two hundred miles from where we are now."

He pointed towards the window on his right, by the side of our table and then resumed his silence. It was as if he had said : "I do not mind your silly chaff about Europe, Washington and inter-allied debts, but I wish you would keep off the grounds of exact science."

The dinner over, I trotted back to my car, undressed hurriedly and fell asleep at once. When I woke up several hours later, it was still night. The dull light of a single lamp disclosed the drawn curtains of the sections and I could hear the even snoring of a Red Cross worker from across the aisle. I sat up, reached for my slippers under the berth,

and my hand touched something cold and wet. "My bottle of White Rock must have broken," I said to myself, putting my bare feet on the floor. I was standing in a pool of water. I switched the lights on. The whole floor was covered with some six inches of water. Only then did I realise that we were not moving. It seemed strange that the engineer should stop the train right in the midst of a flooded area, unless we had reached our destination. I threw a topcoat over my pyjamas and made for the platform of the car thinking that perhaps I had slept through an important episode in Hoover's fight with the Mississippi. There was no one on the platform, however. Peeping through the darkness I could see nothing but water. My slippers were thoroughly soaked by now, so I took them off, rolled up the trousers of my pyjamas and entered the next car. (Dwight W. Davis' salon) as if wading in a river. The Secretary of War and his staff must have been sound asleep, for nothing in his car indicated alarm or even an interest in what was happening outside. I knew that a few steps more and I would trespass on Hoover's bedchamber but my curiosity was sufficiently aroused to brave it. I recognised his stockily built figure from the distance. He was standing on the observation

platform, the bright light of a massive lamp centred on his aquamarine silk pyjamas.

"I am awfully sorry, Mr. Secretary," I said, "but I thought I should find out what was going on."

"Step in," he answered in his usual muffled voice.

I joined him on the observation platform and stood waiting to be spoken to.

"See that?" he finally said, motioning with his eyes toward the black expanse of water below.

"Something floating, Mr. Secretary."

"That something happens to be a telegraph pole."

"A telegraph pole?"

"Yes, a telegraph pole. These tracks are built on a considerable elevation. That is why we are still alive. Won't take long though."

"But, Mr. Secretary, what in the world could have happened to . . ."

He cut me short.

"The dam," he said. "That dam right ahead of us. . . . Broke wide open. The nearest station is twenty miles away. If they are not asleep and have some boats at their disposal, we stand a chance, a very slim chance. If not . . ."



He frowned sardonically. "Must be stunned by the shock," I thought and turned to go.

"Stay where you are," he ordered. "The engineer and his help are doing all they can but there is not much to do, except wait."

"Shouldn't I wake up Secretary Davis and the Red Cross people?"

"What for? If it is the end, it is better for them to perish in their sleep. If we are to be saved, there will be plenty of time to wake them up."

Although he was talking supposedly to me, he never looked at me. Possibly he did not even recognise me. His eyes were riveted upon the slowly rising water. In his shapeless soft pyjamas, standing in the centre of the observation platform with the light from behind beaming on his massive shoulders, he appeared to be enormous, at least forty pounds more than in his usually tightly-buttoned, double-breasted suit.

"Swim?"

"Not much, Mr. Secretary."

"Same here. Funny, isn't it?" He made a throaty sound. "Very, very funny. You work and strive and dream great dreams and imagine yourself quite an important fellow and then . . . The break of a silly dam and it is all over."

He went on, talking in that vein, for a minute or so. His monologue was quite Scandinavian. Had I known then that the train would be rescued before dawn and that the gloomy orator would be elected President of the United States sixteen months later, I would probably have memorised his speech. As it was, I was more interested in the ever rising water. I recall that he dwelt at great length on the "utter futility of human ambitions" and that he used such words as "vanity," "vainglorious," "fatal emptiness," etc., but his exact phrasing escapes me.

The spell was broken by the arrival of Dwight W. Davis. The Secretary of War dismissed the very suggestion of "the end" as something too absurd to befall two members of the Cabinet. He had just talked to the engineer and the latter felt positive that the rescuing party was on its way.

The engineer was right. At five o'clock that morning we were drinking steaming coffee and eating freshly baked corn bread. At six, a few minutes before we reached the safety of a railroad station, the newspaper men aboard were given to understand that it was their patriotic duty to overlook "the trivial incident" of last night.

"You cannot afford to undermine the country's

confidence in the efficiency of the Flood Relief,' explained the official-in-charge.

## 3

THE LATERAN TREATY, restoring most of the privileges of the Holy See, was about to be signed and the enormous Blessing Hall of the Vatican was jammed with hundreds of Americans—Tammany politicians, bankers and dowagers—anxious to provide a thrill for the folks at home. From the place where I knelt, in back of a husky, red-necked New York Alderman, I could catch but a glimpse of the Holy Father's gold-braided robes. An Episcopalian and not much of a church-goer at that, I felt ill at ease in my evening clothes in broad daylight ("full dress, white tie," read the pass to the Vatican) and considerably frightened lest I commit a breach of etiquette. The thing for me to do was to imitate each move made by the Alderman. When he got up, I got up too. When he turned to the left and proceeded toward the exit, I turned to the left and proceeded toward the exit too. I thought someone had touched my shoulder but I did not dare to miss the Alderman. It was only after my arm was suddenly seized in an iron grasp that I stopped,

shifted my eyes sidewise and noticed the gigantic Swiss Guard towering over me.

"This way," he said in French, pointing toward a small door at the opposite end of the Hall. I followed him, puzzled.

"Are you sure it's I you want?" I whispered. We were alone in this endless corridor but somehow it seemed a sacrilege to talk loudly.

He ignored my question and continued to march ahead, past massive carved doors and marble columns, the sound of his steps almost inaudible against the thickness of a deep red carpet.

"You will wait in here," he announced, when after a mile's walk we arrived in front of a surprisingly small room decorated in the early Renaissance style.

I stood for a while, overawed by the beauty and the stillness of the surroundings, then went to the window and sat on the low sill.

There was a click in the wall and a carved panel moved forward. I jumped up and saw a strong-faced man, clad in flowing red robes.

"Mr. Vanderbilt?" he asked, motioning for me to sit in a tall chair adjoining a gilded table.

"Yes . . . Your Grace."

I did not recognise my voice. I hoped against

hope that I was addressing him in the proper fashion.

"I thought you were much older," he said with a slight smile. "Your letter requesting a private audience with the Holy Father was passed to me. At the time I did not think I would be able to arrange it but it so happens that you can be given a few minutes of his time. I must warn you, however, that not unlike his predecessors, he is bitterly opposed to divorce."

I blinked. Nothing could have been farther from my intentions than to discuss the institution of divorce with His Holiness.

"I assure you, Your Grace, that no American journalist, no matter how impertinent, would dare to ask the Holy Father such questions."

"You . . . a journalist?"

It was the Cardinal's turn to be amazed.

"Aren't you the Mr. Vanderbilt," he continued, "whose wife has made the *démarches* before the Holy See to have her marriage annulled?"

Only then did I understand why he expected me to be older. Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt 2nd, the wife of my cousin and a devout Catholic, was trying to secure a divorce in accordance with the rules of her Church.

He listened to my explanation gravely.

"A most unusual coincidence," he admitted after a thoughtful pause. "Seeing, however, that the fault is partly mine I shall let you talk to the Holy Father. It is too late anyway to cancel the arrangements."

It was too late indeed, for hardly had he finished his sentence, when there was another click in the wall.

The Holy Father entered accompanied by two Cardinals. I kissed his hand, received his blessing and stood aside while my identity and the reason of the misunderstanding were explained to him in Italian. He nodded.

"No harm is done," he said in French. "It is very hot here, isn't it?" he added. "A typical Roman July afternoon."

At a sign from him one of the two Cardinals who came with him stepped forward and helped him take off his heavy gold-brocaded robes. There was nothing surprising in the fact that underneath his robes he should wear a silken shirt and a pair of light striped flannel trousers but somehow this revelation struck me profoundly and helped me to overcome my timidity.

The Cardinals bowed and left the room. When

we were alone, His Holiness wearing by now a thin orange-tinted robe, settled in the great throne chair, took off his gold-rimmed glasses and invited me to sit across the desk from him.

"And now," he said, "you can proceed with your questions. What is it that you would like to know?"

Well aware that I was not supposed to quote him directly, only to use his answers as a "background" and "guidance" and having no intention of publishing my interview with him in any of the newspapers, I decided to concentrate on problems of a general character. I admitted that there were several things I and my generation would like to know: the future of the Church, its policies toward the modern State, its views of socialism and communism, its possible rôle in the world shaken by the thunder on the right and the thunder on the left.

"Is that all?" he smiled.

I hastened to apologise for my boldness but he shook his head and said that my questions were not bold, merely human. For a full hour he talked and I listened. Speaking in immaculate, crystalline French, he stopped once in a while and repeated this or that phrase in English as if doubting whether I understood him correctly. There was nothing

“sermonish” in his concise sentences, no “holier than thou” detachment in the train of his thought. What separated him from statesmen, economists, historians and publicists was not his rank or his orange-tinted robes but the fact that no statesman, no economist, no historian, no publicist of the contemporary world possesses his wealth of knowledge or his breadth of tolerance. Some of the things he told me then turned out to be prophetic: he expected a “violent outburst of militant nationalism” in Germany, “untold sufferings for the Church” in Spain and the appearance of a “magnetic leader” in the United States, all of it long before any layman dreamed that Corporal Hitler would become the Reichs Chancellor, King Alfonso XIII a tenant of a provincial hotel in Fontainebleau and Governor Roosevelt the President of the United States. Locked behind the walls of the Vatican, he knew more about unemployment in England than Ramsay MacDonald, more about the inter-allied debts than Mellon and Herriot combined, more about the plight of the American farmer than the shrewdest politician on Capitol Hill.

“How is it possible for any single man to keep in touch with so many continents, nations and



problems ? ” I asked him in sincere bewilderment.

“ It is our duty,” he answered with a characteristic mixture of dignity and modesty, “ to watch our children closely.”

He would neither deny nor confirm that he never relies upon the papers but maintains his own “ news service ” and he waved aside the notion of his “ liberalism ” with a smile.

“ It is not that I am more ‘ liberal ’ than my predecessors,” he explained quietly. “ It is simply that having lost its faith in so many false leaders, the non-Catholic world begins to understand more clearly that in war and in peace, in years of plenty and in days of misery, the Holy See remains what it has always been—a vehicle of enlightenment and Christian culture.”

Preparing to leave I asked him for a favour : back in America someone very dear to me was interested in a young man, bearer of a distinguished European name, and I wondered whether it would be possible for me to get some information about that person. I was often told that a special *dossier* is being kept in the Vatican about everybody who is anybody in the Catholic world.

He weighed my request for a moment, then wrote a name on a slip of paper.

## THE BIG SIX

"Go to see this man in our Library," he said.  
"Perhaps he will be able to help you."

He was. Nothing that has happened to the family in question since A.D. 1400 escaped the attention of the Vatican.

### 4

THE RED JULY SUN was doing its worst by Rome the following morning when a tall, black-shirted guard of the Palazzo Chiggi ushered me into what looked like a convention hall or a fair-sized railroad station. Coming from a blazing street and blinded by the comparative darkness inside the Palace, I hesitated on the threshold, squinting my eyes and searching for a desk, a chair or anything else that goes with a Dictator's office. There was a desk, there were two chairs and there were two men. Eventually I discovered them, discovered them all at once. The desk, an enormous flat affair of black wood, was tucked in the farthest corner. One of the chairs was empty, another occupied by a short but broad human frame clad in a pair of white linen lounging pyjamas. The extra man was dressed in a black cutaway coat and striped trousers and he stood erect by the side of the empty chair.

I coughed guardedly and still neither of the two

men uttered a sound. Possibly such were the rules of the house. Probably they were having a private joke of their own. I decided to advance, slowly but surely. When within a few feet of the desk I recognised the rotogravure eyes and bluish cheeks of the man in white linen pyjamas, and I bowed.

"Be seated," he said in uncertain English. "Is it your first visit to Rome?"

"First since 1922, Your Excellency."

"Then *it is* your first visit to Rome!" He showed two rows of large white teeth and the extra man grinned politely. I grinned too.

"You are a New Yorker, aren't you?"

"Yes, Your Excellency."

"Ah, New York!" He burst into a long exordium in Italian. When he was through the extra man volunteered a rapid-fire translation: next to Rome, New York was the favourite city of Il Duce because of the size of its Italian population.

"Toute traduction d'une bonne causerie est une sottise traduction" (every translation of a hearty talk is a silly translation), exclaimed Mussolini.

I agreed enthusiastically.

"Ah, you speak French. Good! Then it's going to be a real interview. But first of all, I want you to tell me about that new American car."

## THE BIG SIX

He mentioned the name of the latest Detroit model built for people who cherish speed more than safety. I felt at home. I thought there was nothing about automobiles, old or new, that I did not know.

"Pretty fair, pretty fair," he nodded approvingly. "A few years more and you will be building as excellent cars as we do in Milan. You are smiling? Wait. . . ."

He opened the central drawer of his desk rapidly. I expected to see a bunch of blue prints but instead of it he produced a small engagement book.

"You are going to spend this week-end with me," he said, getting up. "I'll show you what a good Italian car can do on a good Italian highway."

The concrete highways being one of the indisputable achievements of the fascist régime, I hastened to compliment him.

"No flattery, my friend," he ordered. "Save it for the week-end. Flatter Italy, flatter this reborn nation but criticise Mussolini. Yes, criticise Mussolini. Nothing in the world like constructive criticism. Mussolini loves constructive criticism. Come here Saturday at ten in the morning. Bring your week-end bag."

And before I could squeeze in another word, I was

back in the street, marvelling at a man who could talk faster than the best of Miami realtors.

Saturday noon found me seated next to Mussolini in his long shining roadster and roaring past towns and villages at a speed that would have netted us at least sixty days in jail on any highway in the United States. The two large black cars filled with black-shirted guards that were supposed to follow on our heels could never get nearer to us than a quarter mile. Each time Mussolini saw through the mirror in front of him that they were approaching he stepped on the gas and we shot forward. He talked incessantly. The Lateran Treaty with the Vatican, the failure of the League of Nations, the possibility of the Danube Union, the future of America, the past of Europe—no subject was overlooked by my exalted driver, none was given more than a couple of phrases.

“Peace ! That’s my motto ! Eternal Peace. Peace agreed upon by the strong and forced upon the weak. Another world war ? Nonsense ! There will be no war in Europe so long as Mussolini is alive. Where the Geneva chatterers failed, fascism shall succeed, etc., etc.”

We stopped often. Before the nightfall of Sunday Il Duce delivered three addresses before the local

fascisti authorities, presided at the dedication of a war monument, reviewed the graduating class of a military academy and witnessed the inaugural flight of a super-bomber. Each time he had to change his informal leather coat for a dress uniform and each time when he returned to the car he made a grimace, nudged me and said : " No holiday for Mussolini. Work, work and some more work." Although I did not understand a single word in his public speeches, so superb was his pantomime, so tale-telling the intonations of his magnificent voice, that no knowledge of Italian was necessary to follow his thought. When he stuck out his lower lip, dropped his head and sighed with his eyes closed, it meant that he was describing the fruitless efforts of democracies. But when he threw out his chest, straightened up and roared—it would have been clear to an Eskimo that he was predicting the universal triumph of fascism.

About eight o'clock on Sunday night he complained of hunger. " Let's speed up," he said, " there are fifty miles between us and a decent dinner." We were making at least eighty and I could not very well see how it was possible to travel faster along a steep country road. But one does not contradict Mussolini. I bit my lip and prepared for the worst. It came almost immediately. There was

a sharp turn ahead of us leading toward a village. The most reckless driver in the world, including myself, would have navigated that turn at not more than twenty. Il Duce made it at ninety. The thing that followed transpired in a fraction of a second. I heard a shriek and saw a group of children. I turned my head quickly. There was a shapeless little form lying on the road back of us.

"Look, Your Excellency!" I cried.

"Never look back, my friend, always forward," he answered without turning and we roared ahead.

Nothing else was said by Mussolini or me, not until two years later when General Smedley Butler who had learned about the occurrence from a friend of a friend of a friend of mine described it in his lecture in Philadelphia. His version made up in colour what it lacked in truth. According to him, Mussolini "patted" me on the knee and said: "What is one life? There are millions of children in Italy." Needless to repeat, Mussolini said nothing of the kind. For all I know, he may have honestly missed the whole episode: few drivers making a sharp turn at ninety would not. It is public property that Il Duce denied ever having met me. It has remained a secret so far that he withdrew his statement and apologised to me twenty-four hours later

when in order to spare General Butler the agony of court-martial I submitted to Henry Stimson, Secretary of State in Hoover's Cabinet, the following exhibits : a large photograph inscribed " to Cornelius Vanderbilt Jr. in memory of a pleasant weekend, from Benito Mussolini," a pass signed by the same name and permitting me to " go anywhere in Italy " and a pair of gold cuff-links monogrammed " B. M." and given to me by Il Duce because I happened to admire them.

## 5

NOTHING hurts a political leader more than an over-developed sense of humour. This homely maxim came to my mind as I sat in a badly swept room of the Kremlin waiting to be received by Stalin. Only a year before I would have laid any odds that Trotsky would become Russia's Dictator and Stalin be reduced to obscurity. It was ironical that what attracted me in the former turned out to be the main cause of his downfall : his brilliance, his demoniac sense of humour, his knowledge of human foibles. He believed that a " communist oasis " cannot survive in a " capitalist desert." He quoted history and economics. He was wise and sarcastic,



well-read and a jack of all trades. He was everything that Stalin isn't. And he was put aboard a freighter and sent to air his theories on a God-forsaken island in the Sea of Marmora, while his adversary remained in the Kremlin, supreme ruler of the "communist oasis."

It would be a good idea, I thought, to ask Stalin for an explanation of that peculiar phenomenon. But then I was invited to step in and saw the eyes of the swarthy man in a dark grey coat buttoned to the neck. They made me change my mind. They were cold and fixed and totally deprived of "divinity," "sparkle" or anything else suggestive of a sense of humour. They were the eyes of a perfect Dictator. The man was not a Napoleon, not a Mussolini, not a Trotsky but a multiplying machine incarnate. He breathed and talked mathematics. Tractors, locomotives, acres, cattle, steel plants, copper mines, soldiers, farmers, boats, trains, everything that could be appraised in terms of manpower and horse-power, everything that could be forced to produce, everything but dreams. . . . He did not threaten, he did not point with pride, he did not view with alarm. He simply said : in order to make a self-containing world out of Russia, it is necessary to double her farming output, to triple the

capacity of her industries, to quadruple her rolling stock and to prepare her army for all eventualities. Could it be done ? Well, he preferred to let statistics answer that question.

"It would take," he said, "five years to complete the first phase of the Plan, another five to consolidate the gains and still another five . . ."

Stalin talked as Einstein would : whether we like it or not, it takes so long (and not a second less) for a ray emanating from Saturn to reach Venus. Were the Russians content under his régime ? "Content ?" The word puzzled him. He asked the interpreter to repeat it. Then he smiled serenely (not much of a smile, just a twist of lips hidden under a crow-black moustache).

"In a communist state," he droned, "we do not deal with contentment or discontentment, only with figures. According to the report of the Council of Agricultural Planning . . ."

The report was impressive if formidable for the mental digestion of a layman. So many more cows per acre than there were in 1913, so many more tractors, so many more hospitals, etc., etc.

The situation in the Far East ? The imminence of a war with Japan ? He did not care to broach such subjects but he did have figures : whereas in the

war of 1904-1905 it required fully six weeks to transport an Army Corps from European Russia to the Manchurian border, the reforms introduced by the Soviet Administration of Railroads cut that time in half. Furthermore (Stalin's interpreter disclosed a pronounced liking for heavyweight words) there was the Red Air Fleet to be depended upon. Exact figures? No, he did not think it would be advisable to make them public. . . .

There was a lot else that I wanted to find out but none of it could have been explained by statisticians. Were I talking to Trotsky, I would have asked him whether there was such a thing as "personal happiness" in Russia. In the case of Stalin, I preferred to mutter my thanks. The years spent in the Press gallery of Congress made me shy of figures: I remembered only too vividly that particular U.S. Budget which was "properly balanced" according to Ogden Mills but underbalanced by some three billion dollars according to Senator Carter Glass. Figures were like that, at least in Washington.

## 6

BACK HOME on my ranch in Nevada, among the people who do not mould the world and who believe

that History is just another leather-bound book, I was handed the biggest surprise of that exciting summer. It came by wire. My Chicago attorney advised me that "Mr. Brown" would wait for me at his apartment in the Hotel Lexington at three in the afternoon, the following day. "Mr. Brown" was and is the nom-de-racket of Al Capone. Accustomed to travel aboard high-powered planes, he thought, no doubt, that Reno was just around the block from Michigan Avenue. I swore but packed my bag at once and made for the Aerodrome. I had waited for that honour ever since Prohibition began and I was not going to lose the major thrill of my misspent youth.

On arrival at my hotel in Chicago, I heard the shrill voice of a newsboy.

"Extra, extra. . . . Pat Roche promises Capone arrest to-day."

This shocked me. The brave Chief of Chicago detectives could have waited at least another day. I rushed to the telephone and called up my attorney.

"Is it all off?"

"Why?"

"The newspapers say . . ."

"You ought to know better. Haven't you been a publisher yourself?"

I smiled pleasantly, went upstairs, put on my best suit and (safety first !) wrote a short note to the manager of the hotel which I marked "not to be opened until 6.30 p.m." and in which I explained to him that strange things were known to happen to the gentlemen entertained by Al Capone. "If I am not back by the time you read this note, please notify the police," I said in the concluding paragraph.

That done, I broke the merry news to my Italian-born valet. Much against his will ("No like Sicilians, plenty tough, plenty bad," he protested) he was to escort me to the Hotel Lexington.

"Which floor is Mr. Brown?"

The pock-marked room clerk sized me up grimly.

"Got an appointment?"

"Yes."

"What's the name?"

He evidenced no surprise at hearing the name.

"Ring up Al," he said to the switchboard operator, "and tell him that a guy by the name of Vanderbilt is downstairs. Is the other guy with you?"

"Yes, he is my . . ."

"I get you. O.K. Go up."

"You didn't tell me yet which floor it is."

"Never mind the floor. Just tell the boy you are going to Mr. Brown."

I was let out on the fourteenth floor and instructed to go "all the way down the corridor, last door on the right." There was no bell but none was necessary, for the door opened the moment we reached it and a voice said :

"Step right in."

We stepped in, I gaily, Peter (my Italian valet) with misgivings.

"Got any rods on you?" asked a well, perhaps a bit too well dressed, shortish red-haired man.

"No," I said.

He ran his hands down my sides, then performed the same procedure on Peter.

"Got to do it," he whispered apologetically. "Orders."

We were standing in a long hall lined with book-cases and filing cabinets. Two unobtrusive-looking men were sitting behind the desks, bent over stacks of papers. I might have been in the office of a commercial concern.

"Wait a while in here," said the red-haired fellow. "Want a magazine?"

"No thanks."

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“ A bracer ? ”

I thanked him again.

We sat down and began to wait. The switchboard was buzzing every minute and the elderly man behind it was answering in monosyllables : “ Yep,” “ nix,” “ hm,” “ o.k.”

Five men entered the hall through a door on the left and one of them extended his hand to me :

“ Very glad to see you, Mr. Vanderbilt.”

I was taken aback. He was much taller than I had expected. There was nothing noisy in his attire : a conservative single-breasted blue suit, plain blue tie, white soft shirt. And his voice was quite pleasant : well modulated and clear. Only the famous scar gave him away. Otherwise he could have passed easily for a substantial merchant of Italian or Greek descent. He would have never qualified to play himself on the screen.

I introduced Peter as my “ travelling companion.” Capone shook hands with him, inquired about his health and added as an afterthought :

“ Must he be present during our conversation ? ”

“ Not necessarily.”

“ Then my boys will take care of him.”

Two “ boys ” stepped forward and led my none-too-brave valet down the hall.

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"Let's go into my private office," said Capone.

It was a fairly large room finished in dull grey and furnished rather sparsely. Just a roll-top desk, a couch, several chairs and a huge safe. There were two portraits on the wall: Lincoln and a young man with a prominent nose. When Capone opened his desk, I noticed a paper-weight similar to the one I have in New York: a tiny replica of the Springfield Memorial. It was grotesque to see it in Capone's "private office" but it provided a nice opening for the interview.

"You must be a great admirer of Lincoln," I said casually.

"Go ahead and laugh," he parried. "I don't mind. Why should I? I have seen so many Lincoln portraits around bankers' offices that it gave me the idea I should get one for myself."

"You do not like bankers, Mr. Capone, do you?"

"I envy them," he said earnestly. "Here I am, Public Enemy No. 1, the meal-ticket of shyster lawyers and bum reporters and who am I with all of it? Just a piker. The real graft goes to the bankers, to your dad's friends. Isn't it true?"

"It depends on what you call 'graft,'" I replied, making a mental note that there was nothing



"gangsterish" in his English, nothing resembling the parlance of the screen heroes.

"Any money over fifty dollars a week is graft, Mr. Vanderbilt. Why should you live on Fifth Avenue and sail a yacht while millions of Americans sleep on benches and in flop-houses?"

"There's something to that," I admitted.

"Something? Everything! Now look, do you know how many people there are on my payroll?"

"I suppose quite a few."

"Over five thousand."

"All in the beer-running business?"

I nearly said "racket" instead of "business" but I caught myself in time.

He frowned.

"Beer, beer and beer. That's all I hear. Why, hardly five per cent of my income comes from beer."

"And the rest?"

"From the rackets. All sorts of rackets."

"You are very frank."

"Why should I lie? Is it my fault that I know no other business?"

Evidently it was his favourite subject, for the next hour was spent by him in a heated discussion of the various shortcomings of American civilisation.

He saw no way of curing our ills except to "kick out state governments, jail all mayors and have the whole show run by the Federal people." Coming from a man about to encounter the U.S. Collector of Internal Revenue, it sounded quite courageous. I told him so.

"Oh, they are only trying to scare me," yawned Capone. "They know very well there'd be hell in this city if they put me away. Who else can keep the small-time racketeers from annoying decent folks? Seen the headlines in the morning papers about Pat Roche arresting me before sunset? Good laugh, eh? Pat is a nice fellow but he certainly loves to see his name on the front page."

"Mr. Capone," I said, gathering my courage, "there is one thing I would like to clear up before I go."

"What is it?"

"Do you have to kill many people?"

He laughed.

"I knew it was coming," he said good-naturedly. "Well, believe it or not, I personally never killed nor wounded a single person."

"And your men?"

"They kill only the rats and they do it on their own. I find out about it from the papers. But never

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mind that dime-novel stuff. Let me explain to you how I work."

He pressed the buzzer on his desk and ordered one of the clerks outside to bring "the documents," a voluminous file of letters, accounts, warehouse receipts, etc.

Listening to his lengthy recital, I felt like a stockholder at the annual meeting of an orderly corporation. Rows of figures. . . . Impressive "confidential" data. . . . Prospects for the future. . . . Activities of subsidiary enterprises. . . .

It was both incredible and amusing to hear the resounding titles disguising various rackets ("Association for the protection of retail tradesmen of Cook County," etc.). So much so that I did not notice the passing of time.

We were getting along famously and were considering an "intimate dinner" the following week, when the telephone rang. Capone lifted the receiver nonchalantly but the next moment his face hardened.

"Wait," he said, "I'll let him speak to you. I hope for his sake that he is not to blame for this row," and turning to me he announced curtly: "Police Headquarters. They say I kidnapped you."

That unfortunate note left by me for the manager

of my hotel ! Had it not been for it, I would have dined with Capone. As it was, I had to rush back and tell the well-meaning fool that although I had not returned by 6.30 I was having the best time of my life.

“ Come again,” said Capone but he was obviously disappointed. I suspect he called me a banker.

## 7

TWO YEARS passed. The Depression was ploughing under two out of each three headliners of the early 1930's. It looked as if I'd have to be satisfied with Gandhi or a hero of a South American revolution. But then I met Hitler, the night he became the Reichs Chancellor.

The following account is based on the entries in my diary.

While they marched, six hundred thousand strong, brown-shirted Nazis and greenish-grey Steel Helmets ; while they roared, two millions of them, ordinarily calm and sensible inhabitants of Berlin ; while they cheered, some twenty millions or more, suddenly maddened Germans of both

sexes and all ages—I did believe in the reality of the chaos around me. But now, as I sit staring at my typewriter, I begin to question whether I really saw what I saw in those four fiery March weeks in Germany, and whether I really heard what I heard in the fantastic domain of Hitlerland.

I wish there were some way of wiring these pages for sound ; for how otherwise, without the accompaniment of howling crowds and thundering bands, can I explain the nature of that miracle which throws a great nation, perhaps the greatest European nation, at the puny feet of a little chit of an Austrian corporal ?

Were he to walk now into this room, settle in the chair across my desk and repeat once more what he told me when I met him on the speaker's platform in the Sports Palace in Berlin, I would laugh straight into his diminutive moustache. Chances are, he himself would join in the laughter. He too would realise how utterly flat, how hopelessly ridiculous, his bedlam manners would appear in the bright daylight of an ordinary country.

Yet there was nothing funny or inept about him when he stood on that platform in the jammed Sports Palace, squinting his impish eyes against the glaring Klieg lights and raising his small feminine

hands in answer to the yells of "Heil, Hitler!" coming from the throats of one hundred and fifty thousand hysterical men and women.

"Tell the Americans," he said to me then, pointing at the sea of waving flags, sabres and canes, "that Life moves forward, always forward, ever forward, irrevocably forward. . . . Tell them that this is the crucial hour in the history of humanity. . . . Tell them that Adolf Hitler is the Man of the Hour, not because he had been appointed Chancellor by Hindenburg, but because no one else could have been appointed Chancellor instead. . . . Tell them that he was sent by the Almighty to a nation that had been threatened with disintegration and loss of honour for fifteen long years."

"And what about the Jews, Your Excellency?" I yelled back. We both yelled. We had to out-yell that roaring "Heil, Hitler!" that had never stopped echoing in my ears ever since the day I put foot on German soil.

He thrust a hand toward me, that flabby feminine hand with surprisingly large knuckles. I was honoured and dismissed at the same time. The drums were already sounding outside. The mob in front of the Sports Palace was howling its impatience to see the great chief.

He parted his red, very red, almost rouged lips in a sarcastic smile

"My people are waiting for me!" he said dramatically and ran his hand through his glossy brilliantined hair. "You hear that song? You hear those drums? See this man here. He will tell you about the Jews and all other things that worry America. Good-bye, sir."

"He" was Hitler's private secretary and Man Friday—Dr. Ernest Franz Sedgwick Hanfstaengl, Harvard, 1909, who made it impossible for me to sit on the platform reserved for the chieftains of the Nazis. I had met him several times before. His Harvard drawl was superb, and his eloquence profound, but I hated to let go of Adolf Hitler.

"Just one question more, Your Excellency: I see by the London papers that the English are accusing you of having some one million two hundred thousand soldiers who could be mobilised and fully armed on twenty-four hours' notice. Now, the Versailles Treaty——"

He turned around and walked away with a jaunty step, his aides trotting behind him in battle formation.

"Do not insist, Mr. Vanderbilt," advised the Harvard alumnus. "I shall be very happy to

explain to you the discrepancy between the real figures and the figures quoted by those silly English papers. It's like this——”

Whatever else Dr. Hanfstaengl had to say was drowned by the music outside. Running toward the end of the platform, I saw the shortish frame of Hitler lighted by the Klieg projectors, scores of mammoth Nazi standards waving over his glossy bare head.

“Heil, Hitler ! Heil, Hitler ! Heil, Hitler !”

They stood for miles around, those maddened brown shirts, shouting, shrieking, singing, urging their chief to lead them against their enemies, ready to die for him and still more anxious to kill for him.

“You are lucky,” said Dr. Hanfstaengl ; “for you are going to see the greatest parade ever witnessed in Germany. Six hundred thousand Nazis and Steel Helmets will march to-night down Unter den Linden.”

I was tired of Nazi parades. In less than three days I had beheld twelve of them, each one “the biggest,” “the most stupendous,” “overwhelmingly inspiring,” each one “symbolising the revolt of Youth, the glory of a bloodless revolution, the proud awakening of the creative Nordic race.” So,



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pleading a headache, I fought my way through the brown columns of roaring youngsters and rushed back to my hotel, just in time to receive messages, one from the Crown Prince, another from his son Prince Louis Ferdinand. The former was willing to grant me an interview in his Berlin palace at Number Thirty-Six Unter den Linden ; the latter promised if I were in Holland to try to let me see his grandfather the Kaiser. I felt elated. No other journalist had succeeded in talking to the Hohenzollerns since the victory of Hitler brought them out of their retirement to the forefront of the European drama. I decided to celebrate.

“ Let’s go and get a peek at the night life of this crazy city,” I proposed to my friends ; and off we went to a well-known café. We were five, four Americans and one German, an elderly Baron who used to occupy a high position at the Imperial Court in Potsdam. Outspoken in his praise of the Nazi régime, the Baron insisted on our drinking a toast to its chief.

“ Here is to the greatest of all living Europeans ! ” he began, rising to his feet and standing at attention.

We stood up too. We expected to listen to a lengthy speech, the eloquence of the elegant Baron

being favourably known to all his friends. Just then we heard a crash. It sounded like the detonation of a bomb, as if this garishly decorated café had been dynamited and wrecked. Turning toward the windows, we saw raised chairs, waving rifles, whirling nightsticks. A score of young Nazis—the eldest of them could not have been more than twenty—were jumping in through the smashed windows, firing at the ceiling, knocking down the tables, the bottles and the pinkish lamps.

“Verfluchte Ausländer——”

“Verfluchte Juden——”

“Verfluchte Schieber——”

“They are looking for foreigners, Jews and profiteers,” obligingly translated the Baron, trying to force a smile. “Youth will be youth, don’t you know. . . . Look here, my friends——”

His last four words were addressed (in German) to the advance guard of the youngsters who had by that time reached our table.

“Get out of here, you dirty swine,” was the curt answer.

“But you don’t quite understand, my friends——”

They did not wish to understand, and they made this clear. When I saw the Baron next, the front of his shirt was red and his coat was tail-less. We were

standing on the sidewalk, pleading with the Nazis to let us have our hats and overcoats.

"Outrageous — revolting — scandalous !" muttered the champion of Awakening Germany, wiping the Burgundy off his shirtfront. "I shall take it up immediately with Captain Goering and Admiral von Levetzov !"

Captain Goering—the all-powerful Minister without portfolio in Hitler's Cabinet—was not available at the moment. He was riding at the head of the parade and was not expected back in his palace until dawn. We had to be satisfied with seeing Admiral von Levetzov, the then Chief of the Berlin police, at one time the leading naval hero of Germany. A very tall, bald-headed, handsome man, he received us with all the courtesy possible under the circumstances : he was sitting at his massive desk at headquarters, going over twenty-five hundred complaints registered that night by "foreigners, Jews and profiteers."

"I am awfully sorry, my dear Baron," he said with a sympathetic sigh, "but you really ought to know better than to patronise those contemptible night-clubs in this historical hour of our national existence !"

The Baron opened his mouth wide.

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"I insist upon an apology, Admiral. My friends here have been manhandled by these roughnecks. Think of what they will tell their friends and relatives in America!"

"I would advise them"—the Admiral's face became stern and defiant—"to tell their friends and relatives in America that we, the Germans, refuse to forget our two million dead. That no one could blame our youth for reprimanding, perhaps a bit too energetically, the persons who dance and drink while we are fighting for our future."

"And how about our hats and overcoats, Admiral," I interrupted this strange explanation of the Police Commissioner.

"I shall see to it that your personal property is restored to you," he answered dryly.

The audience was over. We were shown out and escorted to our hotel along the streets jammed with maddened humanity, past the glaring Klieg lights and roaring bands. I shut the windows tightly, packed my ears with cotton and fell asleep instantaneously. I dreamed I was running after Hitler in the Sports Palace. He was wearing my hat and overcoat. "It's mine—it's mine," I yelled at him, but he merely shrugged his shoulders, raised his flabby hands and said, "Heil, Hitler!"

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My telephone was ringing madly.

"A gentleman to see you, Herr Vanderbilt. He is on his way up."

"But I don't want to see him. I am sleepy. Tell him to wait downstairs."

"The gentleman is not in the habit of waiting," said the porter solemnly, and hung up before I could tell him what I thought of his impertinence.

A knock on my door followed, a forceful, unceremonious knock.

"Who in the devil are you?" I yelled, struggling with the sleeves of my dressing-gown.

"It's only I," said a laughing voice, in English, with a slight German accent.

I opened the door grumblingly, and an exclamation of annoyance died on my lips. Standing on the threshold of my apartment, his handsome young face wreathed in smiles, was Prince Louis Ferdinand, the third son of the Crown Prince, and the particular favourite of the German monarchists. When I met him first, at the Ford factory at Dearborn in 1930, he expected to settle in America and become an engineer. Now he was mentioned by the Berlin newspapers as the future Emperor of Germany.

Waving aside my apologies, he walked in and threw himself on the couch.

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"Where is she?" he asked informally.

"Whom do you mean, Your Imperial Highness?"

"There's always a she. . . . At least, there should be."

He seemed to be in excellent spirits and was evidently enjoying his very "American" manner.

The question of the "she" explained to his satisfaction, he lit a cigarette, looked at me for a moment, and then said quite seriously:

"I wanted to see you bright and early, for two reasons. In the first place, when are you going to give me back my money?"

"Your money? Do I owe you money, Your Imperial Highness?"

"Sure you do. Not you personally, but your compatriots in Michigan. Holding my one hundred and fifty dollars in that bank in Detroit. . . . All that I was able to save while working for the good Mr. Ford!"

We laughed.

"How is this for a bargain?" I proposed. "Suppose I see to it that you get your one hundred and fifty dollars, in return for which you are going to take me to see your grandfather."

"Don't you worry about that. Just as I told you

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on the phone yesterday, I am going to spend this week-end at Doorn, and I'll ask the old man to receive you. But before I forget it. I'd better mention my second reason for this early visit. I read at breakfast the last message of Roosevelt to Congress, and I just had to talk to someone who knows him. He is great, isn't he? That's the way to act. I am so glad he is making a success of his job. I liked him immensely when I met him in Albany last spring. I feel I won't have any difficulty in dealing with America while he is in the White House. That's the first thing I shall tackle when I become Emperor—the German-American relations."

I swallowed hard. The words of Hitler's Man Friday flashed through my mind: "The Hohenzollerns are dead for ever. They cannot come back. It would be suicide for our party to attempt to restore a family which fled from Germany and its responsibilities in 1918."

"Have you ever met Dr. Hanfstaengl, Your Imperial Highness?"

"Know him very well. Nice fellow. So proud of his Harvard accent. I understand that it was originally his idea that I, in preference to my father, should become Emperor."

"But how about your grandfather? Many people

seem to think that he is the logical man to head the German Empire."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said the young Prince somewhat impatiently. "The old man has no ambition to return to the throne. In fact, he dislikes Hitler and distrusts Nazis. He believes that they are using us as a mere bait for the masses. In any event you may rest assured that it is going to be either myself or my father. Von Papen was telling me the other day that the very best thing that could happen to Germany would be to have me in Potsdam and Hitler in Berlin. Something on the style of the collaboration of King Victor Emmanuel and Benito Mussolini."

The word "collaboration" made me lower my eyes. I visualised the face of Mussolini. What would my old friend of the Palazzo Chiggi have thought and said, had he heard that he was "collaborating" with King Victor Emmanuel?

"By the way," exclaimed the Prince, "speaking of Von Papen! Is it true what he told me about Colonel House exercising great influence on President Roosevelt?"

"Nobody is exercising any influence on President Roosevelt, Your Imperial Highness. He is his own influence."



"I hope you are right. Otherwise it would be just too tragic for us!"

"But why?"

"Don't you know that had it not been for Colonel House and his foul Versailles Treaty, Germany would be a flourishing country to-day?"

"You forget about the war, Your Imperial Highness."

"I do not. How could I? But I happen to know that America would have remained neutral had it not been for Colonel House."

I waited. There was no point in trying to explain to this young Hohenzollern that once upon a time there was a ship afloat called the *Lusitania*.

There was a knock at the door. A liveried chauffeur came in, bringing to the Prince a set of automobile permits necessary for a journey to Holland. We shook hands, and he left, reminding me not to forget I was to see him in Doorn next Saturday.

One hour later I was sitting in a beautifully furnished room of the late Kaiserin's Palace in the Unter den Linden, awaiting the appearance of another Hohenzollern, the young Prince's father, the former Crown Prince of Germany.

"This way, please," said a dignified old majordomo, pointing toward a long flight of steps covered

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with a blue carpet and leading into the large green-and-gold morning-room. A few minutes of waiting spent in the inspection of the numerous photographs of the late Kaiserin, and then I heard the door on my right open. The Crown Prince walked in briskly. Everything about his tall thin figure wedged into a tight-fitting greenish-grey uniform suggested the military man. He was wearing across his chest a row of war ribbons, several medals, a large Iron Cross and a small steel helmet—the symbol and emblem of the powerful Legion of the War Veterans (“Stahlhelm”).

“Have a cigarette,” he said in lieu of greeting, proffering me his thin platinum case. “And before you begin to interview me, let me ask you a question. I want a frank answer—if necessary, a brutal answer.”

I bowed in silence.

“As an American and a journalist, what do you think of Hitler?”

“The answer is going to be quite brutal, Your Imperial Highness.”

“I don’t mind that, so long as you tell me your real opinion. I suppose you compare him with Mussolini.”

“I personally do not.”

"Does he remind you of my father?"

"God forbid!"

"Who, then?"

"Have you ever heard of Senator Huey Long and Billy Sunday, Your Imperial Highness?"

"Only vaguely. Why?"

"Because Hitler impressed me as a cross between those two. Ruthless as Huey Long, hysterical as Billy Sunday."

He frowned.

"I am afraid you foreigners are hopelessly biased against Hitler. You do not seem to recognise the importance of his achievements. You personally, as a member of an enormously wealthy family, should be particularly grateful to Hitler. He has saved Germany and possibly the whole of Europe from the tide of communism. His failure would have meant the triumph of the Reds. Some day you will realise it. For your own sake, I hope you do before you have antagonised the public opinion of your country against the new Germany."

The plainness of his speech encouraged me to press my two questions. What about the oppression of the Jews? Was there to be an Emperor in Germany?

He weighed both questions gravely. His resolute

denial of "the so-called Jewish atrocities" was naturally to be expected, but his insistence on the fact that "the Hohenzollerns have never been anti-Semitic" was quite interesting.

"Anyone knows," he said, puffing at his cigarette, "that my father counted and still counts numerous personal friends among Jews. His closest adviser in the days of the Empire, the late Albert Ballin, was a Jew, for one thing."

"Can I quote you on that?"

"I'd rather not be quoted at all, but I see no danger in proclaiming that neither my father nor any one of the members of our family ever was a Jew-baiter."

"And now, Your Imperial Highness, is there going to be an Emperor in Germany? And if so, who is going to be the Emperor? Your father, yourself or your son Ferdinand?"

He smiled, and his sharp humorous eyes rested on the photograph of his late mother for a moment.

"I know nothing about that," he finally said; "but as an interested party, I am naturally anxious to hear what they think about the restoration in the outside world. What's the consensus of American opinion?"

"That the Hohenzollerns will not come back."

“ Why ? ”

“ Because history is moving forward, not backward.”

“ Which way is forward ? ”

“ Toward democracy.”

“ Which way is backward ? ”

“ Toward monarchism.”

“ How very interesting ! ” he said with a sarcastic smile. “ You Americans never get mixed in your directions, do you ? ”

“ You permitted me to talk frankly.”

“ Quite so. Any more questions ? ”

“ Yes, Your Imperial Highness. Is there going to be another war in Europe ? ”

“ Never. There’s nothing to be gained by any European country through another war. I do believe in the common sense of the young generation of Europeans. I do expect to live to see the day when the youth of Germany and the youth of France will realise they must settle their differences in a peaceful, sensible way.”

“ Do you advocate a special Franco-German treaty of friendship ? ”

“ A treaty ? ”

He appeared to be amused. He has no use for treaties. It is his firm conviction that none of the

present European treaties is worth the paper it is written on.

"Why," he said, shrugging his broad shoulders, "take for instance all this talk about the so-called disarmament." And he proceeded to explain that should France ever consent to reduce her standing army to two hundred thousand soldiers, she would still have over a million coloured troops in her African colonies ; that should England reduce hers to one hundred and fifty thousand, she would still retain over two million soldiers in India, South Africa, Australia and Canada, while Germany would have to rely on only one hundred thousand men to protect both her borders.

He discussed the problem of disarmament at great length. He talked steadily for nearly an hour. Seeing that my attempts to switch the conversation back to Hitler and the present moment were failing, I said, pointing toward the Unter den Linden outside the windows :

"When I hear this martial music, when I see these goose-stepping soldiers, I cannot help but think of the summer of 1918 in France. How surprised I would have been then, had anyone told me that a day would come when I would be sitting in a German palace discussing the future of the

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world with the Crown Prince of Germany. I must confess, Your Imperial Highness, we were not fond of you then."

"I know it," he said simply. "You were not fond of me ; and what is much worse, you misjudged my people. You thought my country had started that war ; but since then you have discovered that you were very wrong, hopelessly wrong."

I volunteered no answer. My four weeks in Germany had taught me that there is no point in trying to explain to any son of the Fatherland, be he a Hohenzollern or a simple Fritz Schmidt, that his country was not entirely innocent of the crime of 1914-1918. Going down the flight of stairs, I noticed two paintings: the Kaiser as a young boy, and the late Edward VII. The Kaiser was quite handsome, and his eyes were wide and dreamy. As to King Edward, it was difficult to form an idea of his features, for a large portion of the British sovereign's head was missing.

For three more days I listened to the shouts, "Heil, Hitler !" and witnessed what the Nazi censors were expecting me to describe as "the bloodless revolution." To say that I have seen men killed in the streets and women outraged in their houses would be a lie ; but there is something more

cruel than the firing-squad and more appalling than rape : the Trial by Fear. That I did see wherever I went—pale-faced people who peered from the windows of their apartments and dropped their heads at the sound of the approaching goose-step. If that is the way a nation affirms its birthright, we'd better start revising the dictionary.

On a cold and rainy Saturday afternoon I sat in Prince Louis Ferdinand's elaborate quarters in the Orangerie at Haus Doorn in Holland. Across the moat, a stone's-throw from us, was his grandfather's castle.

"Strange, isn't it," I said, "that you Hohenzollerns are so much easier to see than Hitlers?"

"We are real democrats," he answered with a grin. "So much so that we do not mind strangers coming to inspect our bedrooms. Let's go."

We crossed the beautiful moat drawbridge ("Henry Ford himself can't afford to have a bridge like this," commented the Prince) and entered the Kaiser's castle.

"Here's where I read the foreign newspapers to the old man," explained the Prince as we reached the tall tower. "In that large room downstairs he stages the concerts of the visiting artists, and has a motion picture shown once a week. He has just had



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it wired for sound. From now on he can have his favourite talkies right here in the castle. Step in here now. See those water-colours? Guess the name of the artist."

"I give up," I said shyly, not wishing to deprive him of the pleasure of telling me that "the old man himself" had painted those dozens of ships and soldiers on the walls.

The sound of a powerful motor came from outside.

"The old man! Let's run to meet him."

We rushed down the stairs and reached the door just in time to see the Kaiser alight from a very large limousine with two men on the box. His head and his goatee had grown white since I saw him in 1926, but his figure was just as straight and erect as in the pre-war days, when I used to meet him aboard the imperial yacht in Kiel. He waved gaily to his grandson, and acknowledged my greeting with a grave bow.

"This is Mr. Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jr.," said the young Prince in a tone vastly different from that in which he had chatted with me only a moment before.

"Oh, indeed," said the Kaiser. "Didn't I tell you, sir, when you were here last, that I never grant interviews?"

"But that was seven years ago, Your Majesty."

"Seven years ago or now, my principles have not changed. Do you want me to repeat what I said to you on that occasion?"

I smiled. On that occasion, in the summer of 1926, he chased me away quite unceremoniously, after having told me that all Americans were fools.

"May I ask you a question, Your Majesty?"

"Decidedly not. Why should I answer your questions?"

"I thought you might care to give me a message to the American people, or tell me what you think of the latest events in Germany."

"I have no message for your people, and I usually keep my thoughts to myself. As for Germany, I shall return there only in a wooden box. Good day, sir."

He walked away, leaving the embarrassed young Prince to do the apologising.

"I am awfully sorry, Mr. Vanderbilt; but I was really hoping for a better result. Perhaps, when I see you next time, I will not be just one of Henry Ford's day-labourers any more, and you will have your interview with the German Kaiser."

"You mean that, Your Imperial Highness?"

"I certainly do. Would you turn down the chance

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to rule over seventy million people if it were proposed to you ? ”

### 8

IT HAPPENED IN MUNICH where I came chasing after him when he left Berlin for a three-day rest in the Bavarian mountains. Dr. Hanfstaengl was on the other end of the wire.

“ I will be able to arrange the official interview with the Reichs Chancellor for you, Mr. Vanderbilt,” he said, “ subject to one condition.”

“ Namely ? ”

“ That you donate a certain sum to the fund collected by us for the families of Nazis killed during the revolution. After all, you must admit that they fell while defending the world against the menace of communism. A Vanderbilt must appreciate it.”

“ I do,” I said. “ How much ? ”

“ Five thousand dollars.”

“ Dollars ? ”

“ Yes, dollars.”

“ Is that the best you can do ? ”

“ I am surprised, Mr. Vanderbilt,” he sounded painfully hurt, “ that you should attempt to bargain. The Reichs Chancellor does not care to be interviewed unless it can help the families of his

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dead comrades. No American journalist will be granted an interview for less than five thousand dollars."

"You'd be surprised, Doctor," I said, "how few American journalists would choose to interview your chief at such rates."

I do not regret having failed to see the Führer. But I do regret one thing about this episode. I hung up quickly, but Hanfstaengl beat me to it by one-thousandth of a second.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE EVE

*The original F.R.B.C. men - The state of the nation during the summer of 1931 - "All rich guys ought to be strung up" - "They feed us promises" - "It won't be long now" - "You are a traitor to your class" - "Ever been hungry?" - A conversation with Governor Rolph - Fate of a securities salesman in Globe, Arizona - A letter to Governor Roosevelt.*

#### I

WHAT LITTLE I KNOW about America I owe to my unwillingness to stand the dust and smell of a transcontinental train.

Beginning with the spring of 1919 when I bid my adieux to the A.E.F. I have made it a point to cross the continent by car at least twice a year. I was still perambulating between New York and San Francisco when the summer of 1931 roared in with its moratorium, credit corporation, banking pool and the other nursery gadgets with which Herbert Clark Hoover tried to dike the greater flood.

I was keeping a diary at that time. Looking over its entries now, I stumble across bits and pieces of more than passing interest. Possibly because I was

separated by thousands of miles from Newport and New York, private wire services and high salaried forecasters, probably because I was always more interested in the chatter of hitch-hikers than in the reports of U.S. Steel directors, that very eventful summer of 1931 brought me face to face with something which the Associated Press chose to ignore but which historians will remember. Much as it may displease Jim Farley, he was not the original F.R.B.C. (For Roosevelt Before Chicago) man. It might have been that garage mechanic in Tucson, Arizona, who fully fourteen months before the Chicago Convention said to me, while fixing up a flat—"I kind of like that Roosevelt fellow." It might have been that clerk in a five-and-ten in Los Angeles who bet me in July, 1931, that "the Governor of New York would walk away with both nomination and election." It might have been that doorman in a Seattle hotel who muttered while helping me in the car—"It's Roosevelt or hell."

It might have been any one of several score unsung men and women who talked politics with me on the Lincoln Highway in the summer of 1931. But whoever he or she was, I heard Roosevelt's candidacy discussed long before Jim Farley issued his first broadside.

It is altogether too easy to mistake hindsight for foresight. Rather than speculate on whether Franklin Delano Roosevelt was liked by the highway because of himself or his name, I will quote from my diary. I remember showing it to a wise and shrewd editor when I returned to New York in October, 1931.

"Don't you think it would make an interesting article for you?" I asked. "Highway Nominates Governor Roosevelt."

He cut me short.

"Not a chance," he said. "The fellow's a jelly-fish. What this country needs and wants is another Calvin Coolidge."

## 2

JUNE 15, 1931. Gary, Indiana. I reached here at 9 p.m. Driving through the outskirts I heard a subdued whistle, then the shuffle of feet. Then—how I managed to dodge it, I still am wondering—a large brick crashed through the window of my car and landed at my feet. I pulled up at the curb, fingered the gun in my side-pocket and turned my head slowly. I could see nothing but darkness but I could feel that there were men on all sides.

"What's the big idea?"



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There was a long silence. Then a voice, a surprisingly even voice I thought, said :

"Just to teach you, you blankety-blank millionaire, not to drive around in that bloody car of yours."

"What's wrong with my car ? Anyone who wants it is welcome to it for three hundred dollars. It's five years old and it has been driven over half a million miles."

There was a long silence again. Then the same voice said :

"Our mistake I guess. We thought you was a rich guy."

"And if I were ? "

"All rich guys ought to be strung up."

"But who are you ? "

"We're the fellows that'll do the stringing."

I drove away. The clerk of the hotel to whom I narrated my experience lowered his eyes and mumbled something to the effect that with so much poverty in and around Gary much worse things could happen any day now.

"Take my tip, Mr. Vanderbilt. Their patience is at an end. Another four years of Hoover and . . ."

He frowned and let it go at that. I thought of

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Ogden Mills and his remark made to one of my relatives a few weeks ago.

"I know my American workers. If the worst comes to the worst, they will simply tighten their belts one notch but they would never revolt. They are law-abiding, disciplined people."

What wouldn't I give to see Oggie drive through the streets of Gary, Indiana, after dark in his royal blue, custom-built Rolls-Royce.

### 3

JUNE 17, 1931. Toledo, Ohio. I stopped in front of the Court House attracted by the sight of people sleeping on cots in the open under a drizzling rain.

"Dispossessed," explained the cop on duty.

"Dispossessed?"

"Yeah. Some for not paying rent, others for defaulting on mortgages."

"You mean some of them have come from out-of-town?"

"That's what I mean. Farmers."

"What's going to happen to them?"

"God alone knows."

"Do they have to sleep like that? Outdoors. . . ."

He shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

"Isn't there at least a flop-house in this town?"

"Lots of them. All jammed."

The man on the nearest cot, awakened by our conversation, opened his eyes, sized me up and said :

"How about a cup of coffee, buddy?"

"Don't they feed you?"

"Who d'you mean, 'they'?"

"The town officials . . . the State . . . private charity organisations."

"Sure they feed us. Promises."

"We're short of cash," said the cop, "and the State can't do a thing without a special appropriation from the Legislature."

"And the Legislature is broke," added the man on the cot. "And the President says that good Americans oughtn't to mind starving. So how about a cup of coffee, buddy?"

Passing by the news-stand I bought the New York papers. None of them carried so much as a two-line dispatch about the situation in Toledo. I went to the phone and called up a local newspaper man whom I had known for years.

"What's the matter with you fellows? Why don't

you wire New York about those dispossessed people on the grounds of the Court House."

"Don't be an ass. Don't you know that all that sort of stuff has been taboo for months?"

"But don't you realise . . ."

"I realise everything but it so happens that I've got my own job to worry about."

"But we'll have a revolution on our hands unless we do something."

"So what?"

I hung up. I could not think of anyone in New York or Washington to whom I could write about the situation in Toledo. I knew them all, Republicans and Democrats alike. I visualised their faces. I could almost hear them say—"Very tragic, to be sure, but what would you do, Neil? It's up to the State of Ohio to feed their hungry. The Federal Government must balance its budget. It owes it to the generations of Americans to come."

Stuffed shirts. Iron heads. Dodo-birds and ostriches. Not a single human face in the whole pack. God damn the budget! God damn the generations of Americans to come!

JUNE 18, 1932. Between Toledo and Chicago. I have driven two hundred and eighty miles to-day and I have counted four hundred and eighty-three hitch-hikers. Most of them youngsters, boys and girls under twenty. Blood-shot eyes, torn clothes, dishevelled hair. Some of them begging. Some threatening.

"It won't be long now."—This seems to be the popular refrain which nothing, not even a dollar bill, is able to counteract.

"It won't be long now."

Wherever they come from—not a few of them come from as far as Nebraska, Wyoming and Colorado—they all have the same story to tell. Dispossessionments. Foreclosed mortgages. Parents thrown out of jobs. Families separated. Sisters in search of brothers who left "for the East" months and months ago.

"Gimme a lift?"

"Where to?"

"Anywhere. What's the name of the nearest town?"

"What are you going to do there?"

"Oh, something. Maybe a job."

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There is no point in telling them that there are no jobs available in the nearest town, that there is as little hope for them there as back home. They do not argue. They merely twist their lips and growl—"It won't be long now."

To listen to them, the revolution is around the corner.

"You wait and see," said the most articulate of them, a seventeen-year-old boy who left his parents four months ago in the breadline in a small town in Illinois. "We'll make the bankers cough up our dough."

"You mean your family lost their money through a bank failure?"

"We'll make the bankers cough up our dough," he repeated sulkily. "It won't be long now."

He believed that Senators get "one million bucks apiece" per year. He knew it "for a fact" that "the President has no use for Americans, only for foreigners." His ideas were a peculiar mixture of left-wing communism and outright fascism. His ignorance of history and geography, politics and mathematics was amazing. But there was a mean fire in his eyes. I do not envy a banker who meets him on this highway in a lonely spot. If he ever gets hold of a gun—he is bound to some day—Heaven

## FAREWELL TO FIFTH AVENUE

help the State Police to whom he refers as "cos-sacks." He accepted the proffered dollar bill coldly.

"Make it five," he said after a pause. "I want to buy a rod. We've got to begin arming ourselves."

"Who's 'we'?"

"The poor people. The suckers."

I doubt if he would accept a job even if it were offered to him. With him and his like it's revenge or nothing. When I expressed a pious hope that he would feel less bitter when we met again, he answered with a sneer :

"You won't be riding in this swell car of yours when we meet again."

## 5

JUNE 20, 1931. Chicago. I lunched at the Drake with Mr. —, a life-long friend of my family who is supposed to be "over his ears in railroads and real estate."

"What we need," he said, "is guts in the White House. A President who would understand that bloodshed is not only inevitable but highly necessary. If our democracy is to survive we must be prepared to handle the mob in the way the mob

understands. Bullets. Machine-guns. Bayonets. I know. I know. 'You can do everything you want with bayonets except sit on them,' and all that sort of rot. But that's in theory. In practice it's different. In practice victory belongs to the fellow who beats the other fellow to the draw. As I see it, the mob is about to fire on us. When I say 'us,' I do not mean you. You are a renegade. I mean people like myself and my friends. Men of property. If we are to retain our property—and I for one certainly do not feel like surrendering my property to a lot of hoodlums—we must begin arming ourselves. Stop grinning. There is nothing funny about it."

He gave me a look of profound hatred and I hastened to reassure him that I was laughing not at him but because it was for the second time in the last forty-eight hours that I had heard that remark about the necessity of "arming ourselves." He listened to my narrative gravely.

"There you are," he said when I was through. "In another six months there will be millions of roving revengers like that friend of yours. We must be prepared to meet their challenge."

"Why not try to feed them?"

"We'll feed them bullets."

His hand trembled. His face was crimson red.



## FAREWELL TO FIFTH AVENUE

"I shan't have any dessert," he said. "Damn it all, I can't afford it. Up to a year ago my net income amounted to three million dollars. I'll be lucky if I collect eight hundred thousand dollars in dividends next year."

"Have a piece of apple pie on me."

"People like you, Neil, ought to be strung up. You are a traitor to your class. You deserve no pity."

"What do you think of Roosevelt's chances?" I asked in order to change the conversation.

"I'd rather have his sister. Alice at least has got guts."

"But I did not mean Teddy Junior. I meant Franklin D."

"You make me laugh. That fellow hasn't got a Chinaman's chance. Owen D. Young is as good as nominated. There is some talk about running Newton D. Baker but that's mere talk. We must see to it that the Democrats nominate Young. We can't afford to take any chances."

"I always thought you were a Republican."

"I am a man of property. I like to carry double insurance."

"The people seem to fancy Roosevelt."

"The people will do what they are told to."

He changed his mind and ordered some dessert. The thought of running Young against Hoover had made him feel better.

## 6

JUNE 23, 1931. The tourist camp outside Davenport, Iowa. I had a long chat with the manager of the camp, a man in his late sixties.

"Makes me sort of scared that we've still got twenty-one months to go until March, 1933. I wish we could hold elections to-morrow and have Governor Roosevelt in the White House by early fall."

"What if the Democrats nominate someone else?"

"They won't dare to," he said simply. "We'd tar and feather any delegate who fails to vote for him."

"Why do you like Roosevelt?"

"He is one of us."

"You know, of course, that he comes from a well-to-do family."

"That's neither here nor there. The present fellow was born on a farm right here, in the State of Iowa, and you can have him, free of charge."

"So, it's Roosevelt, eh?"

"As sure as I am talking to you. There's just one thing that might prevent his election."

"What is that?"

"Revolution."

"Who is going to start it?"

"Ever been hungry?"

7

JULY 3, 1931. Sacramento, Calif. I called on Governor Rolph. Pink cheeks, ready smile, fresh gardenia in the lapel of an immaculately cut coat, but with all of it—plainly worried.

"We are going from bad to worse, Neil. I don't trust Hoover. I never did. I can see where he is going to continue preaching rugged individualism and compiling data on one thousand and one various subjects when nothing will be left of these United States. With the possible exception of Pierce he is the least capable Chief Executive we ever had. I'd rather have Harding and his gang of grafters than Hoover and his crew of data-gathering morticians. Harding at least knew how to wear a silk hat. Hoover..."

He waved his hand in disgust.

"I suppose you think that I have enough troubles in my own State without bothering about Hoover, but listen to this. Within the last year some three hundred thousand unemployed have come here to California from almost every State in the Union. I've got to feed them. I've got to do something for them. To take them by the neck and say—'Get out, you are not welcome. . . .' Well, have you ever tried to take three hundred thousand men by the neck? The moment they began to arrive, I started to bombard Washington with wires, letters and long distance calls. I thought that it was the direct duty of the Federal Government to help me feed hungry Americans. Everybody in the State of California thought so. Everybody with the exception of our illustrious adopted son—Herbert Clark Hoover. Do you know how he answered my wires, letters and long distance calls? By lecturing me on the Spirit of America. . . . It would be thoroughly un-American, he said, for the Federal Government to move its little finger in order to help our hungry citizens. . . . Un-American! Ye Gods! Here I am, breaking my head and thinking up ways and means to fill three hundred thousand empty bellies, and he tells me that my attitude is un-American. . . . According to him, I should let those men ring

door-bells and beg for a cup of coffee rather than face the problem and admit that a national problem must be handled with the assistance of the Federal Government."

Again and again he repeated the word "un-American," putting in it all the sarcasm he could muster. He felt rather proud of the camps established by him along the California-Nevada border where the unemployed and the hitch-hikers were given a roof over their heads and three square meals per day in exchange for their help in fighting forest-fires, cutting down trees, etc.

"Mark my words," he said. "The next President of the United States is going to be the man who has enough courage to come out in the open for this or that system of dole. We Republicans will be given the worst licking we ever got not because the country prefers the Democrats but because we are too cowardly to face facts. They talk about drafting Coolidge, and of all the asinine ideas this one gets the cake. It's like exchanging a stutterer for a stammerer."

"What's your guess as to the winner's identity?"

"I don't know. Your guess is as good as mine. But let me repeat once more. In order to win the next year's election, a candidate will have to make

it clear to every child that he believes that it's up to the Federal Government to feed the hungry Americans."

"What if the Democrats nominate Young or some other Wall Street man?"

"God forbid! If they do, we are going to witness bloodshed that would make the Civil War look like a brawl in Market Street."

## 8

JULY 11, 1931. Globe, Arizona. Alighting in front of the tiny shack occupied by the local Western Union, I saw a group of men armed with shot-guns. They eyed me suspiciously. "What's wrong?"

They remained silent. I went in. So many hold-ups had taken place throughout the south-west in the past two weeks that I decided that the men outside must have been a sheriff's posse about to embark upon a manhunt.

Crouching behind a plain wooden table, next to the girl-operator, was a middle-aged man dressed in a suit of unmistakably Eastern cut. Both he and the girl were frightfully pale. They watched me write my dispatch without taking their eyes off me for a second. I felt uncomfortable. I hoped I did not

## FAREWELL TO FIFTH AVENUE

resemble some famous south-western bandit. When I put the blank in front of the girl, the man motioned to me to come closer and whispered :

“ I’ll pay you fifty dollars for your glasses.”

I blinked. My dark glasses couldn’t have fetched more than ten dollars at the height of the boom-market.

“ You must be joking,” I said.

“ I wish I were. Those men outside are waiting for me. Unless I manage somehow to change my appearance it’s curtains for me.”

“ But who are you ? ”

“ I am a salesman for the Blank Security Company. I had the misfortune of having sold to several local people the bonds of a now defunct corporation.”

I looked at the girl. She nodded.

“ It’s true, mister. It’s just as he says. Those men are waiting for him to get a better look at him. Someone recognised him at the depot and spread the news around.”

I hated to part with my glasses but the girl assured me that I could buy another pair from a local druggist.

The man put my glasses on. They did change his appearance somewhat but being made for a very

near-sighted man they must have made it difficult for him to get his bearings.

He walked out slowly and started to cross the sidewalk toward his shining new roadster parked on the opposite corner. The men with the shot-guns moved toward him. Whatever they said to him—I could hear the sound of voices but could not distinguish the words—he turned brusquely and waved his hands in the direction of the Western Union shack. That was a grave tactical error. The next moment a staggering blow from behind sent him reeling on the pavement.

“Keep still,” said the girl. “There is nothing more we can do.”

They lifted him like a sack of potatoes, threw him in a decrepit Ford sedan and drove away.

“Do something,” I shouted at the girl. “Call up the sheriff.”

“Don’t talk foolish, mister. The sheriff’s life wouldn’t be worth a nickel if he tried to protect a Wall Street chiseller.”

## 9

JULY 16, 1932. Flagstaff, Arizona. I spent the night in a tourist camp on the outskirts of this town. Got up at sunrise, paid my fifty cents and decided to



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call on some friends here. I thought I had seen misery back in Ohio but that was prosperity in comparison with what I saw on the highway this morning.

They were travelling eastward, those hosts of hitch-hikers. I was travelling westward. Dodging their stares as I was, I could not avoid seeing their faces, their clothes, their feet. I felt ashamed of my brand new Bond Street oxfords. I was the only man on that highway wearing a pair of shoes. It would have been easier if those people had tried to abuse me, if they had shouted insulting remarks about myself and my car as those others had done in Ohio. But not a whisper came from them. They marched with their heads hung low. I had to toot my horn all the time. None of them asked me for a lift or a cup of coffee. They were beyond the stage at which a human being still hopes for help.

Entering the town I saw a group of five : a man, a woman and three children. The man's bare feet were bleeding. I stopped the car, opened my bag and got out the first-aid kit. The woman blushed.

"It's very sweet of you. . . ."

Judging by the thick growth of beard on the man's face, I thought he was fifty. It turned out he was twenty-eight. Two months ago he had lost his job

## THE EVE

in a fruit-packing plant somewhere near San Francisco and decided that there was nothing else for him to do but hitch-hike to Georgia, to his mother's farm. It took him and his family over six weeks to get as far as Arizona.

"Do you realise," I asked, "how many miles there are between here and Georgia?"

He realised it. He hoped to reach there before the first frost.

"The moment I get to Georgia," he said, "I'll try to see Governor Roosevelt at Warm Springs. He always comes there around Thanksgiving Day. He ought to know about the situation in this part of the country."

"What can he do?"

"He is going to be our next President. He ought to be told."

Waiting for me at the Western Union office in Flagstaff was a telegram from a newspaper syndicate in New York :

"Return East immediately. Would like you to interview Ford, Firestone, Edison, Schwab and other industrial and financial leaders about the prospects for recovery in the fall."

ORDERS ARE ORDERS. I did go to interview Henry Ford, Harvey Firestone, Charles M. Schwab, etc., and I did get what the newspaper syndicate wanted—a firm reassurance that the depression was over and that the winter of 1931–1932 was to usher in the return of prosperity. According to my notebooks I interviewed a grand total of one hundred and forty-four “financial and industrial leaders” in the late summer of 1931.

On the way East I stopped at Biloxi, Miss. I had to brace myself before I could face the Great Men of Wisdom. In the frame of mind I was in after Arizona I could have easily bitten a chunk out of anyone predicting the return of prosperity—which would have been most embarrassing for all parties concerned. So for ten days I lay in my bathing suit on the sand, thinking and grieving, more grieving than thinking. I visualised what would happen if I attempted to go to my parents’ house in Newport and tell them and their friends about what I had seen on the highway.

I could almost hear the dictatorial voice of Myron C. Taylor of United Steel :

“Stop exaggerating, Neil. There is nothing more

dangerous than generalisations. This country is not going to the dogs just because you happened to run into a few bare-footed men on the highway."

I could almost see the cynical smile on Frederick Prince's face. "Poor, poor General Vanderbilt. To think that a man of his achievements should have such a hopeless son."

And the women ! The garrulous females gathered around my mother's table ! Fancy them listening to me ! They never doubted but that I was bereft of my senses. Now they would wink at each other and smile a rotogravure smile. Once outside the doors of Beaulieu they would sigh and say in a chorus : "What a cross poor Grace is carrying ! That son of hers. . . . Isn't he just too frightful for words ? "

As for New York . . . I did not have to go to New York to know its reaction to anything transpiring west of the Hudson River. Nothing that could possibly reflect on the sales of the department stores could ever find its way into the Manhattan newspapers. Not a line was used by them of my dispatch dealing with the lynching of the securities salesman. All I got for my pains was an angry telegram telling me to "lay off the depression stuff."

For a moment I considered the advisability of

stopping in Washington on my way to New York. But whom could I find there at the end of July? Even if I managed to sneak into the White House and get past Herbert Clark's secretaries, I would be told—at the very best—to get in touch with the governors of the states in question and enlighten them as to the suffering of their citizens. As if they needed to be “enlightened.” As if they were not keeping the long distance wires hot with their S.O.S. calls.

Senator Borah? But he has never made a speech in summer unless it happened to be a Presidential Election summer. Calvin Coolidge? But he was another one who believed that it was better for his countrymen to starve within the letter of the Constitution than eat in accordance with its spirit. William Randolph Hearst? But nothing he would say or recommend could possibly impress the Administration which he despised and by which he was hated.

Among the people I had known the only ones who would have listened to me sympathetically and who would have agreed with me that the choice lay between Revolution and Dole were precisely the ones who had no influence whatsoever. Upton Sinclair, Congressman Lemke of North Dakota,

Father Coughlin, Colonel House, Harold L. Ickes of Chicago.

At the end of my ten days at Biloxi my mind was made up. I decided to write a long letter to Governor Roosevelt. Naturally enough, he was the first one I had thought about but I was afraid that having known me ever since I was a boy of six he would be inclined to disregard my information and smile at my advice.

I have never worked on anything as hard as on that letter to Roosevelt. I re-wrote it dozens of times. Each time I would be about to mail it, I would think of something else which I had forgotten to mention. Then I would read it again. And then I would tear it up. What seemed so tragically vivid, so painfully conclusive on the outskirts of Flagstaff, Arizona, sounded flat and faked-up when put in black and white. I felt with every drop of my blood that he was the only one who could save the country from a civil war, but there was a world of difference between feeling it and expressing it.

I remember the size of that letter : twenty-three pages, single-spaced. I remember saying in the post-script that I had no fish to fry, that I realised only too well that even if he were to be nominated and

elected, no President of the United States could afford to give a job to a Vanderbilt.

His answer reached me a week later in Florida. I was to get in touch with Louis Howe at once. Inasmuch as he didn't state whether or not he wanted to use my services, I asked a friend of mine to go to Albany and talk things over with Mr. Howe. Another week passed and then the telephone rang in my room in Tampa. Governor Roosevelt was speaking.

"I want to have a long chat with you. The sooner the better. How long will it take you to get here?"

It took me practically no time at all. The state troopers along the road from Tampa to Albany must be still talking about the crazy fellow in an old Packard who rushed past them with a speed that made their motor-cycles look like so many turtles.

"I am not a candidate yet."

Those were the first words with which I was greeted on entering Roosevelt's bedroom in the Executive Mansion in Albany. He was having his breakfast in bed.

When I left him that noon, it was agreed that I was to conduct my independent surveys of the country and keep in constant touch with him and

William Crawford who was to act as publicity director of his pre-convention campaign. Neither then in 1931, nor after the Chicago Convention in 1932, was I given a title, an expense account, or anything else suggestive of an official position. I worked for him because he was nominated by the highway. He accepted my services because he believed in my sincerity.

Around that time there was a man in Chicago who for the reason of failing health took a motor-trip through New Mexico and Arizona in the late summer of 1931. He, too, had to drive past thousands of bare-footed hitch-hikers. He, too, was impressed by the constant repetition of the name "Roosevelt." He, too, volunteered his services, free of charge, and with no strings attached. Each time I pass through Washington nowadays, I drop in at his place and we talk, talk for hours, of the tragic summer of 1931. The name of that Chicago man is Harold L. Ickes. He has brought more constructive ideas to Washington than any other man within our lifetime.





## CHAPTER NINE

### THE GREAT HYSTERIA

*Bullet-proof steel shutters – A student of trends – The cowardice of the very rich – Good old Ogden – An interesting meeting at Mr. Mellon's home – The Metropolitan Opera House disgrace – Society flees to canned goods – Mr. Hearst ends the Great Hysteria.*

#### I

“TAKE A GOOD LOOK AT IT, NEIL. Never again will I or anyone else get one of these pretty little things for attending a directors' meeting.”

The speaker sighed wistfully and pocketed the twenty-dollar gold piece. We were standing in front of his cabin on Bailey's Beach in Newport. He had just returned from New York where he attended a Board Meeting of a giant corporation. It was late Friday afternoon of September, 1931, fully eighteen months before the United States went off the gold standard.

“What do you mean?” I asked. “Has it been decided to discontinue the practice of rewarding you big corporation boys for your strenuous labours?”

"Your ignorance would have been fascinating," he said, "had it not been so painful. Where have you been hiding yourself all these months? On the moon or in Tibet?"

"Not quite. I was making a survey of the country."

"A survey of the country!" He shook with laughter. "It must have been one of those Jim Farley surveys we hear so much about. Well, my boy, now that you have completed your survey, why don't you take the bandages off your eyes and the cotton out of your ears?"

He went inside his cabin, repeating to himself the word "survey" and laughing uproariously.

I swore. It served me damn' right. I should have known better than to spoil my first day in Newport by stopping to talk to the old bore.

The next person I met was a pretty young girl whom I had not seen since the winter before.

"How is your mother? Working busily on your sister's *début*?"

"God, no. Fancy anyone bothering about *débuts* in these times."

"As bad as all that?"

She ignored my question.

"Listen, Neil," she said. "I am in a jam. I

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simply must find the address of some reliable makers of steel shutters and I haven't got the foggiest notion where to go about it. Mother naturally thought we should keep this matter secret even from her secretary. . . . Will you help me ? ”

“ Steel shutters ? What kind of steel shutters ? ”

“ Bullet-proof ones, of course.”

“ Bullet-proof steel shutters ? ”

“ There might be some special name for them but I hope you get the general idea.”

I didn't. She stamped her foot.

“ Oh, damn it all. If mother would only listen to me and do what the others are doing. I'd rather be alive in Europe than dead behind steel shutters here. And speaking about Europe. What do you think is safer, the Dutch florin or the Swiss franc ? Most of our friends sent their money to Amsterdam but I read this morning in the *Wall Street Journal* that there are lots of Bolsheviks in Holland. The whole thing is one big mess, if you want my opinion.”

She turned abruptly and walked away, before I could ask her another question about the mysterious bullet-proof steel shutters.

THERE WERE thirty of us at the table that night. My neighbour on the right, a retired banker and a highly admired student of "trends," was treating me in an almost civil fashion. He expressed an interest in my health. He thought I was working too hard. He complimented me on my latest article in a popular weekly. I felt shocked. Whenever we had met before he had made it painfully clear that he consented to breathe the same air with me only because of my parents. Something was up, I knew, but what? "Be careful," I advised myself. "This is a smoke-screen. The attack is forthcoming."

Aloud I said :

"Fancy you, of all people, reading my articles."

This should have been his cue to deliver the first blow but he kept still. And so did the other people at the table.

After a long pause the student of "trends" said, without looking at me :

"If you were in my position, Neil, would you risk re-opening your town house or would you remain here?"

This was too much for me. It was alarming enough to hear him worry about my health, but to

have him ask my advice. . . . I glanced right and left, expecting to see sarcastic smiles and laughing eyes but caught instead an expression of fear mixed with anxiety. If they were pulling my leg, those well-groomed women and tanned men, they were doing it beautifully.

"If I were you," I replied gravely, "I would order a set of bullet-proof steel shutters for my town house and transfer my money to Switzerland. One cannot depend on Amsterdam. There are altogether too many Bolsheviks in Holland."

"One cannot depend on Amsterdam." repeated the student of trends earnestly. "You are dead right, Neil. That's what I said yesterday to the boys at Number Twenty-Three. 'Switzerland for me,' I said, 'she will be the last one to go under.'"

A dead silence followed his words. When he spoke again, everybody leaned forward and listened reverently.

"Tell me something else, Neil, and please speak frankly. We've known you for many years. You are among friends. You needn't be afraid of our indiscretion. According to your information, when will they swing into action? Are their leaders waiting for the first frost or might they begin earlier?"

The boys were telling me that we'd be lucky if it doesn't happen before Thanksgiving Day."

"Action." "It." "They." Neither at the table nor afterwards on the terrace where we went to finish our fantastic conversation did the student of trends dare to pronounce the word "revolution." When I asked him point-blank whether he actually believed in the inevitability of a revolution, he frowned and said that "the thing" should be classified as a probability, not a possibility. He likewise told me that his mind was made up. He was not going to move back to town, steel shutters or no steel shutters. He was going to stay in Newport within taxi-ing distance of his ocean-going yacht which was to be kept under steam, day and night, ready for a three-thousand-mile jump on a second's notice.

"England will go off the gold standard within ten days," he concluded in a whisper. "We will follow her lead almost immediately. And then the machine-guns will begin barking."

He was right about England. She did leave the gold standard nine days after our conversation.

## 3

THE STORY OF THE SEVENTEEN MONTHS which intervened between the suspension of gold payments by England and the declaration of the banking holiday in Michigan is a story of cowardice. The cowardice of the very rich.

The future historian of 1931-1933 will learn little, if anything, from books and newspapers of the period. Unless admitted to the archives of the Clearing House Association of New York he will never realise the velocity of that storm of hysteria which raged over Wall Street and Fifth Avenue from September 20, 1931, until February 14, 1933. The butcher and the candle-maker may have waited for the declaration of the banking holiday in Michigan to begin their hoarding, but in so far as multi-millionaires were concerned the flight from the dollar had been successfully completed long before the new meaning of the word "holiday" was accepted by the solemn editors of the Standard English Dictionary. Not less than two billion gold dollars were transferred to Switzerland, Holland, Belgium and France within those seventeen months. The self-same gentlemen who said afterwards that it was an unforgivable crime on President Roosevelt's



part to have taken the country off the gold standard, did all they could in 1931-1933 to bring about the worst panic ever experienced in America.

They needed cash in order to buy Swiss francs and Dutch florins, and they stopped at nothing, trying to raise cash. They sold "at the market" huge blocks of stocks and bonds. They forced the heads of mortgage companies to lend them millions of dollars on their real estate holdings. They withdrew every cent they had on deposit with out-of-town banks. They borrowed on jewellery, yachts and motor-cars. The series of breaks which occurred in the stock-market in the fall of 1931 owed its origin to that cry of "On to Amsterdam and Basle" with which Society returned from Newport and Southampton in the closing days of the month of September, 1931. Nothing mattered to them except "liquidity." Nothing could have checked their maniacal activities except a prompt embargo on any and all gold shipments. Andrew Mellon and his then assistant, Ogden Mills, could have spared America the tragedy of 1933 if they had acted swiftly, but Andrew Mellon and Ogden Mills owed an allegiance to their set—to the ladies and gentlemen who were transferring their money to Switzerland and Holland and who were equipping their

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mansions and villas with bullet-proof steel shutters.

"I say, Ogden," said the chairman of the board of an eastern railroad while talking to Ogden Mills around that time, "when do you think we'll be pushing off the gold?"

"If at all," said Mills, "not before February 1, 1932."

Whatever Mills himself might have meant by that none-too-concise statement, it was interpreted by Fifth Avenue and Wall Street as a brotherly warning that the flight from the dollar should be completed by them within one hundred and twenty days.

"Good old Ogden," said the people who knew him since the days he was knee-high to a duck. "There's a fellow one can depend on."

Good old Ogden was dependable, indeed. And so was his chief, "poor old Andy." Unlike their successors Woodin and Morgenthau, uncouth fellows who dared to act without tipping off their hand to Wall Street, Ogden and Andy saw to it that due notice about the forthcoming Treasury moves was always given to the worthwhile people. When shortly after the English *débacle* President Hoover decided that "something" should be done for the smaller out-of-town banks and suggested the idea of the National Credit Corporation with a capital of

500 million dollars, poor old Andy said that it was just fine but that the New York bankers had better be given sufficient time to acquaint themselves with the details. Wouldn't the President agree to meet a few Wall Street gentlemen and discuss his plan with them in the privacy of his humble servant's apartment. What was wrong with the White House, wondered the President. Well, it was like this : the appearance of Messrs. Lamont, Whitney, Mitchell, Davison, etc., at the White House might cause a whole lot of unnecessary and totally premature rumours while no Washington correspondent would bother to picket Mr. Mellon's apartment on a Sunday afternoon.

And so it happened that perhaps for the first time in the history of the United States the Chief Executive held a meeting with Wall Street not in the White House but in a private apartment in the north-western section of the national capital.

The meeting having been called for 8 p.m., Sunday, October 4, 1931, the Wall Street delegation boarded the trains the previous afternoon. Some of the gentlemen summoned by poor old Andy alighted in Philadelphia, spent the night there and continued their journey southward by automobiles. Others left their trains in Trenton and declared to

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the newspaper correspondents that they were on their way to visit a sick friend in that section of New Jersey. Mr. Lamont and Mr. Whitney of J. P. Morgan & Company, were obliged to change trains several times. Still greater precautions were taken in the case of President Hoover. The night before an empty Presidential car with drawn curtains was dispatched to Camp Rapidan. "The President will remain in his camp until Monday and he does not wish to be disturbed," read the statement issued to the White House correspondents. At 7.45 p.m. on Sunday, October 4, the President sneaked out of the Lincoln Study where he had been hiding since early morning, took a taxi and, unrecognised by anyone, motored to the scene of the clandestine meeting. On his arrival there he was met by Messrs. Mills, Mellon, Whitney, Lamont, Winthrop W. Aldrich (Chase National Bank), William C. Potter (Guaranty Trust Company), Charles E. Mitchell (National City Bank), Frederick H. Ecker (Metropolitan Life Insurance), Mortimer N. Buckner and Harvey Gibson (both of the New York Trust Company), Walter E. Frew (Corn Exchange Bank), Percy H. Johnston (Chemical Bank and Trust Company), Jackson E. Reynolds (First National Bank), Henry Bruere (Bowery Savings Bank),

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Seward Prosser (Bankers Trust Co.) and David F. Houston (Mutual Life Insurance).

The talking was done by the President. He talked for two solid hours at the end of which period he was "thanked" by the gentlemen present and asked to allow them "a week or so" to study his plan. It was 10.30 p.m., Sunday, October 4, when the meeting was adjourned *sine die*, the participants, good citizens and sterling Americans, having duly promised not to breathe a word of it to anyone, not even to their immediate families. The long distance and transatlantic operators of the American Telephone & Telegraph Company will never forget that Sunday night. By the early morning hours of October 5, there was no one "of importance" left in New York, London, Paris, Amsterdam, Brussels and Berne who did not know that the smaller American banks were in a desperate situation and that a \$500,000,000 corporation was to be created within the following ten days for the purpose of postponing inevitable bankruptcies. The double nature of the tip—bearish as to the months to come, bullish as to the immediate future—was properly exploited by the "boys." They bought stocks at the bottom, sold them on the rebound and rushed their profits abroad the moment the White

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House issued an official statement about the National Credit Corporation. The public sighed and said : " Isn't it peculiar that there is a break in the market each time the President tries to do something really constructive ? " The " boys " laughed but said nothing : their faith in the dependability of poor old Andy precluded the necessity of a comment.

Whenever I read nowadays vitriolic editorials attacking Franklin Delano Roosevelt for the " vagueness " of his pronouncements and " lack of sincerity " disclosed by his actions, I visualise the bitterly disappointed faces of the " boys " who were taught by Mellon and Mills that " sincerity " is but a synonym of " tip-off " and that " vagueness " denotes an unwillingness to play ball with Wall Street.

To quote the head of one of New York's biggest banks : " You want to know why I hate that fellow Morgenthau ? Well, for one thing, because it is thanks to him that I have to study the morning newspapers in order to discover what my Government is up to."

THE DECISION to leave the Metropolitan Opera Company to its own devices marked the highest point on that chart of Society's hysteria. I do not know the name of the person who was the first to stumble across the brilliant idea of letting the masses finance entertainment for the upper classes but I do know that the suggestion was received most enthusiastically in the houses of the box-holders of the Metropolitan.

"Now that we don't dare to display our jewellery in public, why should we continue to support those wops?"

Not every inhabitant of the Diamond Horseshoe was as outspoken as that domineering Newport dowager but all of them shared her feelings.

"If they like to hear the opera, let them pay for it."

"Subscribe for the 1933-34 season? Not on your life. For all I know the Soviets will be here by then. . . ."

"Let them remove the bread-line from the vicinity of the Metropolitan first. Fancy my driving past that mob wearing my emeralds."

"Five thousand dollars? You are joking. . . ."

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At the present rate of exchange I can still buy nearly twenty thousand Swiss francs for five thousand dollars."

"I do not give a hang for Tibbett, Ponselle and the whole gang of them. It was different in the days of Caruso. Then the Opera was the Opera. Now it's as bad as Union Square."

"Don't talk to me about educating the masses. We wouldn't be where we are to-day if we had not spoiled our poor people by letting them inside the Opera House."

The money spent on food and champagne served at lunches and dinners given for the sole purpose of discussing "that Metropolitan thing" would have been sufficient to finance an entire unabridged season of the Opera, but money was not the issue, only a smoke-screen. The box-holders who later on "graciously consented" to make a radio appeal to shoemakers and tailors could have raised the necessary sum in five minutes through the simple medium of producing their own cheque-books but that would have deprived them of a glorious opportunity to prove to "the Soviets" that there was no more money left on Fifth Avenue. And so hysteria got the upper hand over common decency, and thousands of people who were never



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able to afford the price of an Opera ticket were asked to kick-in their nickels and dimes and spare the box-holders the agony of wasting their precious Swiss francs. Few events in modern American history were as disgusting and as revealing in their boundless hypocrisy as that Save The Metropolitan Drive conducted by the millionaires among the paupers. Were I to draw the composite portrait of Society I would divide it into three panels :

1. Frank Munsey signing his horrible will ;
2. Mrs. Vincent Astor addressing the sales girls of R. H. Macy and begging them to come to the rescue of the unemployed ;
3. Society flooding the air with their S.O.S. calls for the Metropolitan Opera.

## 5

THE RETREAT to the farms accompanied by a frenzied hoarding of canned goods constituted still another chapter of the Great Hysteria of 1931-33. It must have gladdened the hearts of the Campbell and Heinz people to discover that Fear was creating an unprecedented thirst for tomato soup.

According to the theory prevalent around that

time, the Revolution was to rage in big cities only.

"They would concentrate on New York and Philadelphia, Boston and Chicago," said the fashionable historians. "They've no interest nor the necessary following outside the city limits."

This sounded preposterous, disclosing as it did the most amazing ignorance of recent European revolutions, but the idea of stocking up some five or ten thousand dollars' worth of canned goods appealed to the childish imagination of Society. A private census taken by the metropolitan caterers in the winter of 1931-32 proved conclusively the triumph of the Fifth Avenue theory of revolutions. Around 35 per cent of the families who used to return to town not later than October 1 stayed on their "farms" in Maryland, Virginia and Delaware for the duration of "uncertainty," and not less than 20 per cent moved to inconspicuous apartment-hotels in the East Seventies and Eighties.

Passing through Virginia on my way back from the coast to Washington, I spent a night in what was formerly a cheerful country estate and what looked now like a combination of warehouse and fortress.

"Yes, my boy," said the host contentedly. "We are well prepared, if I may say so myself. We have

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enough sugar, tea, coffee, canned soups, fruits and meats to last us for at least two years. And as for fire-arms . . .”

He motioned me to follow him into a large cellar. There, arranged in a neat Army regulation fashion, were two machine-guns, several automatic rifles, a dozen or so of shot-guns and a pyramid of wooden boxes marked “Handle with care—explosive.”

“If the worst comes to the worst,” he explained in tones which would have honoured the last of the Bourbons, “I will meet violence with violence. When a Government fails its citizens, it is the right of the citizens to defend their lives in any way they deem expedient.”

What made him believe, I asked, that the Government was going to “fail” him?

“I know what I am talking about,” he said. “No one but Calvin Coolidge could handle this situation, and he refuses to be drafted. It’s either Hoover or Roosevelt. Hoover is yellow, he always was.”

“And Roosevelt!”

“No backbone. He’s a delightful jelly-fish.”

He caressed one of his machine-guns tenderly, and we went upstairs to dine off a can of tomato soup, a jar of sausages and some preserved peaches.

“We dare not be extravagant,” apologised my

host. "We've got to get accustomed to frugal meals."

## 6

THEN CAME THE CHICAGO THUNDERSTORM. What would have happened if the Ohio delegation had listened to the eloquence of the Raskob-Tammany-Ely crowd and had cast its unanimous vote for Newton D. Baker on that second ballot, could be only surmised.

The air was charged with hysteria. As doorkeeper of the Convention (to which exalted post I was appointed by Jim Farley in recognition of my pre-Convention services), I watched the temper of the Western delegates at close range. The Southerners might have compromised on Ritchie or Byrd. The Easterners were about ready to repeat their 1924 performance and accept any corporation lawyer recommended by 23 Wall Street—either Mr. Morgan's personal attorney, John W. Davis, or the chief counsel for the Van Sweringen interests, Newton D. Baker. Only the Westerners were rabid on the Roosevelt subject. Coming from the part of the country crucified by twelve years of the Morgan régime, they would rather have walked out and started another Bull Moose movement than deserted

Roosevelt. None of them would have dared to face "the folks back home" with the Baker or Davis button on his lapel. Had Hearst not beaten Tammany to the draw and switched the vote of the California delegation on that roaring last ballot—there would have been three men running for the Presidency in November, 1932 : Hoover, Baker and Roosevelt. This, in turn, would have split the Democratic vote and assured the re-election of Hoover on November 8 and bloodshed before Christmas.

I remember talking to a delegate from Nevada a few minutes before we learned of the Roosevelt-Hearst-Garner compromise.

"It looks like Baker," I said. "The Easterners are going to deadlock this convention for at least fifty ballots and with each successive ballot they will take a few more votes away from us."

He ground his teeth. His eyes were bloodshot. He was wearing a two-days' growth of beard.

"Like hell they will," he yelled. "Not a blankety-blank delegate west of the Mississippi will ever vote for Baker if we have to sit here from now on. Why they'd lynch me back home if I'd try so much as to talk civilly to a Baker supporter. It's Roosevelt or civil war, I'm telling you."

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He meant it, too. And so did at least three hundred more delegates. I remember their names and I remember as well those others who are posing today as "the original Roosevelt men" and who would have switched to Baker, Davis, Byrd, Ritchie or any other "compromise candidate" quicker than one could say "post office." Long after every one of the Hearst "twenty-eight newspapers read by some twenty million Americans" is forgotten by the living, the incredible Lord of San-Simeon will be remembered as the man who nominated President Roosevelt and checked the sway of the Great Hysteria.

### 7

THE ART OF "COLLECTING" is something which I have never been able to learn. I worked for Roosevelt not because I hoped to "collect" but because in no other way could I have expressed my hatred for mediocrity masquerading as statesmanship. When people ask me whether I was ever rewarded for my services, I produce my Chicago Convention badge. As for jobs, I never asked for one and I am pretty certain that I would not have been given one even if I had asked for it. People like myself cease to be an asset the moment the votes have been

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counted. We retire with all the grace we can muster and we wait until we hear once more the sound of the third alarm. We won't be necessary in 1936, but we may be called to the colours in 1940.

"That's politics," according to Jim Farley, who is unusually well acquainted with the subject.

## CHAPTER TEN

### ON THE ROAD TO WASHINGTON

*The road to Reno and the road to Washington - Opinions of the great - W. K. Vanderbilt - Doris Duke - George Whitney, Jr. - Dwight W. Morrow - Frederick H. Prince - Beaverbrook - Poincaré - The Rich Young Men of Washington - "We" and "they" - The mother of a President - A magnificent die-hard - The rebirth of the Federal Government - Colonel House on F. D. - The song of America.*

#### I

"EVER DONE IT BEFORE? Not afraid of getting lost?" asked the late Lord Northcliffe when I offered to motor him from British Columbia to Nevada.

"I could find the road to Reno blindfolded," I replied with a flourish.

"Very interesting," he said innocently. "And how about the road to Washington?"

I laughed politely. I had to : he was my house-guest. At the time—1921—I did not think much of his joke. Now I appreciate it. Some of the British jokes are such : it takes a cataclysm to provide them with a point.

In 1929 everybody who was anybody in society



knew his or her road to Reno. In 1934 it is becoming fashionable to follow the road to Washington. What has happened in between amounts, if not to the break-up of a civilisation, at least to the break-up of society.

For three and a half years we were going to the dogs. Everybody thought so. Everybody said so. What really saved us was that the art of going to the dogs, a highly cherished tradition in England, has never made much headway in America. With the exception of that legendary Virginia colonel who retired to his well-stocked cellar right after Appomattox and refused to come out or even receive his mail, as a nation we were always loath to admit the imminence of Doomsday. Just as it is natural and sincere for a Britisher to predict over his whisky-and-soda that in a few years the Empire will be carried to Potter's Field and the Union Jack discarded, it is natural and sincere for an American to follow his spells of despair with an outburst of enthusiasm. The break-up of society, a slow and a continuous process in England, has the habit of striking the United States with the violence and rapidity of an earthquake. It is sufficient for the Steel Corporation to pass a dividend on its common stock, to make us jump up and proclaim in chorus :

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"It is all over. The world has come to an end." For the self-same Steel Corporation to publish a slightly better quarterly statement is sufficient to make us smile and admit unanimously : " We'll pull through all right. All is not lost yet."

### 2

SAID MY COUSIN, W. K. Vanderbilt, who inherited the largest share of the family's railroad holdings : " There is no point in dodging facts, Neil. In another ten years there won't be a single great fortune left in America. The country will come back—it always does ; but we won't."

His " we " included not the Vanderbilts only, but every other American " dynasty " as well. The Rockefellers, the Morgans, the Bakers, the Astors, the Mackays, and so on.

" What do you propose to do about it ? " I asked.

" Do ? What can we do ? Everyone for himself. . . . I personally shall spend some of the remaining time in cruising aboard my yacht, seeing the world and trying to have a good time. If I were twenty years younger, then perhaps. Oh, well, what's the use ! I am not twenty years younger."

Said Doris Duke, the so-called " richest girl in the

world," who is easily twenty, and then some, years younger than W. K. Vanderbilt :

" Doesn't it make you sick, all that talk about my money ? As if we were living in normal times ! As if nothing at all had happened in the last four years threatening to separate me from my money ! "

Said George Whitney, Jr., the son of J. P. Morgan's partner :

" Don't you envy your father, Neil ? I do envy mine. Think how simple it was for them to make their careers. They didn't have to worry about the New Deal and all that it implies. They didn't have to watch the revolutionary trends and keep their ears to the political ground. In the days of their youth nothing was respected more than the ability to make money ; while now——"

Said Dwight W. Morrow, shortly before his death in October, 1931 :

" Our generation did your generation in. There is no getting away from it. First we sent you to fight a nonsensical war ; then we saddled you with a nonsensical peace. We have failed dismally, we, the old fellows, Republicans and Democrats alike. It is up to the youngsters to rebuild these United States. There could not and should not be a recovery for the old fellows ! "

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Said Frederick H. Prince, who built, bought and sold more American railroads than any other human being :

“ Some ten years ago I invited a young statistician to accompany me on one of my tours of inspection throughout the Middle West. While he was with me, I tried to teach him what every railroad man must know : the ways and means of soliciting freight, the costs of operation, the duties of the management, and so forth. Very well, sir. The other day in Washington I met him again. Believe it or not, right from the reel, he proceeded to tell me how I should run my carriers. It so happens that he is the very chap entrusted with the reorganisation of the railroads. Funny ? Isn't it ? But significant too.”

Said a relative of mine, an elderly lady of considerable wealth :

“ How disgusting ! How horrible ! To think that my own grand-nieces should have fallen so low as to work for that Bolshevik La Guardia. When I was their age, I was not permitted even to go to a church where I could have met politicians.”

Said Lord Beaverbrook, the proprietor of the largest chain of newspapers, when I talked to him last in Berlin :

“ A side-show, nothing but a side-show, all these

Continental skirmishes ! You are wasting your time in Europe, young man. To-day's big story is in America. She is breaking wide open, that miraculous country of yours. Everything depends on the result of the American Experiment."

Said Raymond Poincaré shortly before his death in answer to my request for an interview : " No interviews, no statements. My day is done. My bolt is shot. The New Deal ? Naturally, I am not in sympathy with it. I am a Frenchman, don't you see. If I were an American, I would throw out my chest ! "

3

WORDS ? So many words in so many languages ? Not quite. When I see W. Averill Harriman prominently identified with the leadership of the N.R.A., I realise that we have travelled a considerable distance since the days of his father, Czar Harriman of the Union Pacific.

When I open a magazine published by Vincent Astor and read an editorial inviting President Roosevelt to switch boldly and unreservedly to " the left," I close my eyes and visualise the very aristocratic figure of Colonel John Jacob Astor. What would he have said and done were he to

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foresee that the Astor millions would be used to advance the cause of radicals ?

When I listen to a speech glorifying Soviet Russia and delivered from the platform of the New School for Social Research by a young man whose face is familiar to me, I feel like pinching myself : " Is it possible that the orator is Corliss Lamont, the eldest son of that self-same Thomas W. Lamont, the genius of J. P. Morgan & Co., in whose presence I am obliged to watch my P's and Q's and lay off the ' incendiary stuff ? ' "

Then there are my own cousins, two of them : Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney, who ran for Congress on the " Forgotten Man " platform ; and William H. Vanderbilt, president-pro-tem. of the Rhode Island Senate, accused by his elders of " dangerous radicalism." The former is, of course, the only male heir of the late Harry Payne Whitney, who left something like three hundred and fifty millions of dollars (it took three columns of the *New York Times* to enumerate his stocks and bonds) ; the latter is the great-grandson of the man who in answer to a reporter's reminder, " The public is waiting for your statement, sir," delivered his classic " Public be damned " pronunciamento.

And then there are the Rich Young Men of

Washington : Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr., of the Morgenthau Manhattan real estate holdings ; Ambassador William C. Bullitt of the Pennsylvania Bullitt fortune ; Progressive Republican Senator Cutting of the New Mexico Cutting interests ; Secretary of War Dern of Utah mining fame. Their youth must be emphasised even more strongly than their wealth. Richer men than they have been known to Washington and Pennsylvania Avenue (Mellon, Dawes, Eugene Meyer, Jr.), but no young millionaire has cast his lot before with a progressive administration.

Cutting is thirty-nine, Bullitt, forty-two ; Morgenthau, forty-three. We would have to go back to Alexander Hamilton to find a younger man entrusted with equal responsibilities. But Hamilton was a conservative, a stand-patter who invariably lined up on the side of grey hair and tradition, while the present crop of governmental youngsters is directly traceable to the break-up of society.

"They have answered the call of a progressive leader," say the old war-horses of the Democratic party, who are quite at home with "call" and "progressive," not because they really know what these words mean, but because they remember hearing William Jennings Bryant use them.

The real explanation is not so simple as that. Neither T. R. nor Wilson ever commanded such an "exclusive" following, though both were progressive and capable of sounding calls. T. R. had to be satisfied with ambitious lawyers: Elihu Root, George Wickersham, Taft. Wilson was surrounded by professional politicians. Why? Because in 1900-1920 politics was still considered a dirty game. It took the earthquake of the depression to make the so-called best families of America recognise that Pennsylvania Avenue is as important a thoroughfare as Wall Street, and that there is no other way of cleaning up politics save by stepping in and washing the faces of the politicians.

Up to 1929 it was considered a sign of queerness or outright insanity for a young man of wealth and position to run for a political office. Properly discouraged, he usually stopped reading Washington dispatches by his senior year in college, and switched his interests toward the financial page. He was told by his betters that the most important thing in life is to learn the difference between "we" and "they." "We" stood for members of his social set and leaders of Wall Street; "They" for those ninety-six fellows in the Senate and the rest of official Washington.



"We" possessed names—first names, last names, maiden names. Awake or asleep, sober or drunk, our young man was expected to remember that before her marriage to Mr. X., Mrs. Y. had two daughters by her first husband: the present Mrs. Z., who was about to divorce Mr. Z. and marry Mr. W., and the present Mrs. N., whose husband's first wife was a granddaughter of the man who arrived in the State of Nevada with ten cents and left it with two hundred millions.

"They" had no names. "They" were "they"—dangerous, uncouth fellows who interfered with "legitimate" business, talked incessantly and foolishly, and were responsible for the nervous tension in the stock market.

"How many U.S. Senators do you people know by name?" I asked once at a social gathering in Newport where "we" were chastising "them."

"Too many of them for my own good," grumbled an elderly banker who had just returned from a trip to Washington. "To begin with, that Bolshevik Borah——"

"Who else?"

"Those other two Bolsheviks, Norris and La Follette."

"Who else?"

"Isn't that enough?"

"Hardly. There are ninety-three more."

He frowned and tried to change the subject. I persisted. After much prompting from all sides, he was able to produce four more names: Carter Glass, Huey Long, William Gibbs McAdoo, and Hiram Johnson. Of his own State's two Senators, he was able to remember but one. He described him as "a chap with a German name."

"And the other?"

"Search me!" And he walked away in complete disgust.

Poor as his batting average was (7 out of 96), he was a veritable well of senatorial information in comparison with another friend of mine, a famous American dowager who lives in London and advises her British friends about how to handle "that dirty crowd in Washington."

"Silly boy!" she said. "Fancy your examining me! I know them all. Boies Penrose, Knox, James Phelan of California, Henry Cabot Lodge——"

"But they are all dead, dead for many years now."

"Serves them right," she said vigorously. "They should all be dead."

ON ELECTION EVE of 1932, I sat at the dinner-table of Mrs. James D. Roosevelt in Krum Elbow, her ancestral estate at Hyde Park. The country was about to go to the polls, and the continent was tense with expectation ; but all was quiet and serene in this fine old colonial house. Perhaps, admitted the hostess, she should be more nervous, awaiting the results ; perhaps she should be planning to cling to the telephone to learn the news about those small towns in Massachusetts which are usually through voting well ahead of the rest of the nation ; but—she smiled apologetically.

“ Would you believe,” she said, “ that I cannot concentrate on what will happen to-morrow ? Try as I will, I simply cannot. Not only because I am certain that Franklin will be elected President before midnight, but mainly because I am constantly thinking of that other November Tuesday, twenty-two years ago, when he was running for the State Senate. I shall never forget that day. I was the only sympathiser he possessed among his own people. Every one of our friends said that it was both shameful and ridiculous for as fine a young man as my son to associate himself with dirty

politicians. They hoped he would be defeated. They hoped for his own sake that he would learn a lesson. Well, he wasn't defeated, and he did not learn his lesson. When he went to Albany two months later, our friends came to console me. Yes, to console me ! ”

She laughed a hearty laugh ; then she went on talking. She predicted that the day was at hand when, partly inspired by her son's example, partly prompted by the change in prevailing ideas, the young generation of America's old families would enter politics and take their places “ in the councils of the nation.”

“ It is a safe bet,” I said, “ that you will live to see your grandson James in the front ranks of American statesmen. The governorship of Massachusetts or——”

No, she did not want to discuss the chances of her grandson. Her mind was still on that November Tuesday of 1910.

“ To challenge corruption single-handed, as Franklin did then, was perhaps as heroic an undertaking as the one that is facing him now. The spirit of the times is on his side to-day, but it was against him then ; he was quite alone—in his campaign, and later on in Albany.”

I happen to know that President Roosevelt agrees wholeheartedly with his mother's estimate of his two campaigns. He, too, believes that it was even more difficult for him to blaze the trail in 1910, than to lead his party to an overwhelming victory in 1932. For had he listened to his friends and elders twenty-two years ago, there would have been no New Deal now. Had he conceded then that there was no way of cleaning up politics and reforming the politicians, he would have been to-day just another corporation lawyer, summering in Newport and hibernating in Wall Street.

"I do not understand," he said to me once, shortly after the Chicago convention, "how any young man can remain immune to the fascination of a public career. Just think how shallow money-making is, compared to what could happen to one in politics. Money never interested me outside of trying to earn my living. What good is a million dollars, if you have to waste a whole lifetime in getting hold of it?"

He was speaking with that contagious sincerity which distinguishes all his utterances. Listening to him, I thought of that silly middle-aged chatterbox in Newport who spent the entire summer of 1932 in going from door to door and telling her friends

that "society would snub Frank Roosevelt." Just as it never dawned on him that he was a whole generation ahead of the friends of his childhood and early youth, it never dawned on her that the day "Frank" Roosevelt was inaugurated, there would be nothing left of what she and hers had called society. . . .

5

"WHAT HAVE YOU to say now about your sainted F. D.?" The speaker, a celebrated Wall Street banker, was choking with indignation. We had just listened-in on the President's broadcast, warning those "who line their nests at their neighbour's expense."

Before I could answer his question, he thundered on :

"Is that the way to talk about the men who made America what she is to-day? Is there no other word to describe us except that atrocious 'money-changers'? How can my own son respect me, when I and mine are being constantly blasphemed and humiliated? 'Chisellers'—'Tories'—'Money-changers'! Is it fair? Is it dignified?"

"What makes you think that the President means you and yours? Are you a 'chiseller'? And as for

your son, you evidently forget that he volunteered his services to the New Deal right at the very beginning of the present administration."

"That's just it," he roared. "As if it were not sufficiently bad to be labelled 'money-changer,' I have to lose my son on top of it!"

"What makes you think you have lost him? The boy is highly regarded by his superiors. Everyone predicts a brilliant career for him."

"Superiors—career!" he repeated venomously. "Since when have politicians become my son's superiors? And what kind of a career is it for a boy with his background to mix with a bunch of cow-country lawyers, ward-heelers and dog-catchers? Had anyone told me two years ago that my son would be doing what he is doing now, I would have—I would have——"

He was gasping for breath. He could not finish the phrase, but it was obvious that he would have committed nothing short of mayhem two years ago had he known that his son would be championing the New Deal.

"Now look," I said compromisingly, "isn't it better for your son to try to make a political career than to follow in the steps of his former friends who divide their time between the polo-field and the

brokerage office, who will never amount to anything, who will wind up as their elders did, sitting in the window-chairs of their Fifth Avenue clubs and discussing stocks, horses, golf and other men's mistresses ? ”

“ My son's former friends are gentlemen,” he replied sternly.

“ Isn't he a gentleman, too ? ”

“ No politician can be a gentleman.”

“ Is that the reason why some fifteen generations of the Marlboroughs were anxious to hold political office ? ”

“ This is America, not England. Over there they ‘ stand ’ for Parliament ; over here we ‘ run ’ for Congress.”

“ I see,” I said ; “ and no gentleman must do any running, unless after money.”

“ You see nothing ! You are a traitor to your class, and it is only natural that you should wish to corrupt the others.”

“ Traitor—class—gentleman.” Nothing that had taken place in America and in the world since 1929 had made the slightest impression on this magnificent diehard. He was still thinking in terms of Murray Hill and Newport ; he was still believing in “ we ” and “ they.” Even the fact that his own



son switched over to "them" failed to change his convictions. Politicians were dirty, politics a graft. That was final. He would much rather see the United States go to the dogs than have his son run for a political office.

## 6

FATHERS AND SONS, die-hards and firebrands. It is tempting to describe the present break-up as the revolt of youth, but this description would be both erroneous and platitudinous. Walking past the endless corridors of the mammoth Department of Commerce in Washington now occupied by the N.R.A. (in the parlance of the national capital: "Had it not been for Hugh Johnson, grass would be growing to-day in the streets of the Department of Commerce"), I meet "youngsters" of all ages. Some of them voted for Bryan in 1896, though their vigorous step belies their grey hair. Some have perambulated between T. R.'s Square Deal and Wilson's New Freedom until the very advent of the New Deal. Some would prefer Socialist Thomas to Franklin D. Roosevelt, because years ago they worked for Eugene Debs and Robert La Follette, Sr. Some are hypocrites and fakes: no great movement can escape the pestilence of hitch-hikers. But

whether sixty or twenty, pink or black, dissatisfied with the past or thrilled by the future—all of them view the Federal Government for the first time in their lives not as a vicious monster that imposes taxes and passes silly laws, but as the greatest constructive force on the American continent.

“What is the matter with you fellows?” exclaimed President Roosevelt at one of his “off-the-record” Press conferences. “Have you lost your ability to criticise? Have you forgotten how to find flaws?”

No. They are as critical as ever, those hard-bitten newspaper men who followed Harding on his trip to Alaska; and they bow to no one in their knowledge of the fine art of flaw-finding. What paralyses them is that the national capital they have known for over thirty years—the playground of widows, lobbyists and lame ducks—has suddenly turned into a Mecca filled with first-class pilgrims. One can be as cynical as a postmaster-general acknowledging the “best wishes” of a Congressman, but one must admit that something else besides jobs, money and publicity-thirst sent the Harrimans, the Astors, the Bullitts, and the Morgenthau scurrying to Pennsylvania Avenue. When the record of the first year of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s administration is written

by future historians, it will sound almost Pollyannaish : for every professional politician seeking patronage in Jim Farley's office, there were ten idealists who knocked on the doors of Johnson, Wallace and Ickes and said : " What can you use me for ? I am not interested in salary, and I do not give a snap for glory, but I can't remain idle."

A natural question arises : what has made those too-good-to-be-true people quit their Fifth Avenue mansions, lucrative law-practices and extremely well-paid jobs ? Limelight ? But the majority of them are never mentioned in the newspapers. The band-waggon spirit ? Why, then, did they stay away in Coolidge's heyday ? The social possibilities of the Capital ? But they did not have to put themselves under the heavy hand of General Johnson in order to dine at the British Embassy. The instinct of self-protection, the desire to assure a legislation favouring their special interests ? Wrong again. The N.R.A. reduced their personal incomes, in some cases by fifty per cent.

" Why are you here ? " I asked a young man whose fortune runs well into nine figures. " Do you expect to get an ambassadorship ? "

" God forbid ! Fancy the Senate ever confirming anyone with my name and financial background."

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"Like your work?"

"A twelve-dollar-a-week clerk could do it as well as I."

"What's the mystery, then?"

"No mystery at all. The prestige of the Government."

"But you say yourself that you are only a clerk."

"It is a darn sight better to work as a clerk for the Government than to roll my thumbs and pretend I am learning my father's business."

His argument was not overcharged with logic. Inarticulate as all his countrymen, when forced to admit the validity of idealistic motives, he talked of "the prestige of the Federal Government," but what he really meant was its irresistible appeal. He, too, was stranded on the road to Reno. He, too, had noticed what the others of his age had noticed when the *débâcle* came: the utter helplessness of the men who were posing as half-gods, the collapse of everything—institutions, reputations, theories—and the sudden, wholly unexpected rebirth of the phoenix known as Federal Government. In his schooldays he was told that "Lincoln fought for the preservation of the Union." He had learned that phrase parrot-like. Not before the stroke of

twelve on the morning of March 4, 1933, did he really discover what the "preservation" and the "Union" stood for.

7

THE REBIRTH of the Federal Government ! No other achievement of Franklin Roosevelt helped so much to turn despair into enthusiasm as the fact that for the first time since Lincoln, possibly for the first time since Washington, the nation became fond of the Federal Government. We may have respected Wilson. We may have granted Coolidge that he "minded his own business," but we were not fond of either of the two, not at least until their deaths.

To quote the head of one of our largest industries, who dined with me right after signing his N.R.A. code : "The man is a magician. I do not agree with a single word he says. I am opposed to his political philosophy. I dislike his phraseology. I resent most of his actions. I have no respect for his intimate advisers. I spend sleepless nights rehearsing what I would like to tell him about his programme. I get all worked up. And then——"

He waved his hands helplessly :

"Then I am ushered into his presence, and he

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asks me about my wife, my children and my associates. I answer grumblingly that they are as well as could be expected under the circumstances. I beg myself not to give in. I pray the Almighty to maintain my bitterness and stubbornness. I refuse to look him in the face. But he takes a pencil and a piece of paper, and the first thing I know I have consented to something which will cost my corporation untold millions of dollars and endless hours of headache. Why do I do it? Damn it all, I am fond of that man. I simply cannot say no to him!"

"Did you say you are *fond* of the President?"

It is as if I were told that the Spanish inquisitors were fond of the heretics they burned at the stake. . . . For it so happens that the gentleman in question is about the most conservative man in the United States. There is so little in common between him and the originator of the New Deal, that both must feel like engaging the services of an interpreter for their conferences.

His case is not unique. Every day the reception-room of the White House is jammed with firm-chinned, cold-eyed visitors who have come to tell the President what they think about his programme, and who leave an hour or so later, having signed whatever he asked them to.

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The magic charm of a personality ? The appeal of the Lincolnian surroundings of the White House ? Yes, partly. But only partly. To solve the secret of Franklin D. Roosevelt, one must get outside the big cities, one must meet face to face those twenty-two million "forgotten men" who put the magician where he is to-day.

"Do not call him a magician," advised my friend Colonel House. "Call him a student of American geography who profited by his knowledge of the existence of Nebraska, Minnesota, Iowa, the two Dakotas and the other foster States of the Union."

## 8

NO ADMINISTRATION IS IDEAL. How can it be ? There has never been, nor ever will be, ten saints in the United States. And so long as it takes ten persons to form the Cabinet of a President, people will be shaking their heads knowingly and smiling cynically and saying reproachfully : "Well . . . What have you to say now about your beloved hero ?"

To every age its measure. To every Goethe his Winkelmann. To every President of the United States his Gaston B. Means. Some day—and that

day may not be far away—the New Deal will be presented with the bill for the *faux pas* made by its ferocious enthusiasts. “*Faux pas*” is a euphemism and so are “ferocious enthusiasts.” Plainer words and harsher terms can be found to describe some of those who pose as liberals and who ride with Franklin Delano though they used to run with Warren Gamaliel.

When I sit in the lobby of the Mayflower and watch the well-fed gentlemen and the tightly-laced ladies stuffing hot *hors-d'œuvres* in the ornate dining-room, I feel as though nothing at all had happened in America since midsummer 1923 and as though Edward Beale McLean was still acting as master of political ceremonies in the National Capitol.

When I walk into the waiting-room of the Executive Offices of the White House and take a sniff of that air of petty intrigue and sophomoric generalship which is so peculiar to all places inhabited, even if temporarily, by secretaries of a President, I have to remind myself forcefully that the name of the benign gentleman behind the massive desk is Colonel Marvin McIntyre, not Colonel Bascom Slemp.

When I dance in the early hours of a Sunday



morning in a smoke-filled ballroom of the mammoth Shoreham where Old Dealers are buying drinks for New Dealers, I recognise that Washington is still but a state of mind at best, a profession at worst.

When I loiter in the marble lobby of the Senate and listen to the none-too-subdued—"What's your bill? I've just the man to put it through for you," I bow to the inevitable and I pray God to deliver the President from his friends.

No political party can be kept out of office for twelve years and be spared the pangs of hunger; no man, no matter how great or how fastidious, can escape the punishment of the Howes, the McIntyres and the Earlys. Not that the Democrats are doing anything which the Republicans would not have done in their place; not that the present secretarial staff of the White House compares unfavourably with its predecessors on Pennsylvania Avenue. Far from it. It is simply that both the party and the presidential secretaries have been cut to fit a midget. The party has to settle its debt to job-seekers and lobbyists. The presidential secretaries have their pasts to live down. The former used to exist off the largesse of far-sighted gentlemen who to-day are practising law in the corridors of the Mayflower and are charging six figures for their services. The

latter, up to the year 1932, were small-time reporters. It takes a small-town reporter anywhere from three to six years to get accustomed to the absence of a City Editor. How many millions of dollars it takes to repay a lobbyist for "services rendered"—no one knows. Visualise a city where every white man is in a frightful hurry to collect and you will understand why the President prefers to do his thinking in mid-ocean. Long before he has reached the end of his first term, he will be obliged to chop off many a head. There will be lots more James P. Warburgs, and Lew Douglasses, suffering from cold feet and running toward the nearest exit. And there will be lots more "valuable" members of the party, caught at practising law in a fashion never dreamt about by the Bar Association.

This is as it should be. In the words of Mussolini—we were still on speaking terms when he explained it to me—"you seize power with one set of people but you govern with another." All sorts of people were included in the set that rode on Roosevelt's band-waggon. Most of them will be in retirement by the time the summer of 1936 is here. The General Johnsons shout too much. The Colonel McIntyres think too little. The Lew Douglasses are haunted by Balanced Budget, the Rex Tugwells by Planned

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Economy. The Mullens mistake 1934 for 1921, the James P. Warburgs for 1896. It is not unlikely that the most popular man in the present-day United States will be the loneliest man in the world by March 4, 1941.

Very often, when driving past Number Sixteen Hundred Pennsylvania Avenue after 10 p.m., I think of him sitting in his bedroom on the second floor, going through baskets full of cables, telegrams, reports and private correspondence. The grandchildren and Colonel Howe have long since gone to bed. Mrs. Roosevelt is either out of town or making her calls. Mrs. Dall and "Missy" (Marguerite Le Hand) are paying the price of their social popularity. McIntyre and Early are renewing acquaintance with their own families. The President is alone. True enough, he can press the button by his side and summon his valet McDuffie or his body-guard Gus Gennerich or he can open the door and press another button—outside in the hall—starting a general alarm throughout the White House. But McDuffie and Gennerich must be given their "moment," and as for the general alarm, Calvin Coolidge was the only inhabitant of Number Sixteen Hundred who had a weakness for that kind of practical joke.

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Ten p.m. in the White House is but seven on the Pacific Coast. If it's not the San Francisco long-shoremen who fight for the control of hiring halls, it's Upton Sinclair who toots the loud horn on his brand-new Epic.

"I sleep like a top," boasts the President.

I hope he does. For all I know, a top may not sleep at all, just close its eyes and pretend it is asleep.

## 9

I WAS MOTORING from Chicago to San Francisco. Once more—for the forty-fifth time in my life—I was crossing the continent in an automobile. A few miles outside Des Moines I stopped to listen to the highway. I have long since learned to translate the tooting of the horns and the moaning of the brakes into the words of the Song of one hundred and twenty-five million.

To me the highway is more eloquent than the best of Congressional orators. It never juggles facts ; it never misquotes ; it does not hide the truth under a barrage of doctored-up statistics. It simply says : " Listen carefully to the chatter at gasoline stations and roadhouses, and you will hear America. Watch the smiles and the frowns of the truck-drivers, the

hitch-hikers and the hoboes, and you will read in them what you can never find in the report of a Roger Babson."

The highway is a mirror and a prophet. It told me of the coming *débâcle* months in advance of October 24, 1929. It shouted "Governor Roosevelt!" when the cities' sidewalks were disputing whether it was going to be Newton D. Baker, Owen D. Young or another four years of Hoover. It announced the recovery while Wall Street was still preparing for revolution and famine.

Fifteen years have passed since that day in 1919 when, a recently discharged private, I first stopped on this Iowa highway and promised myself to return to it again and again. Looking back upon my youth now, I can see that whatever I have learned about America, I owe to my restlessness, to my unwillingness to stay where I supposedly belonged—in a walled circle where everyone was reading the same morning paper, going the same places, repeating the same phrases, suffering with the same agony of blackmailers, kidnappers and commoners. I thought of the rich boys who went with me to the St. Paul school in New Hampshire, and who have since become bankers, stockbrokers and important executives, and I pitied them. I

realised how difficult, how well-nigh impossible it must be, for them to get acclimated in this new America. While I was motoring my two million miles and sleeping in the twenty-five cent camps, right here in this state of Iowa, they were watching the ticker, and they missed what was happening west of the Hudson River : the labour unrest in Washington, the race riots in Oklahoma, the oil war in Texas, the socialistic experiment in the Dakotas, the farmers' strike in the corn belt, the planters' walk-out in the cotton belt, the mining revolt in Pennsylvania and West Virginia—they have missed all of this. They may have read of it in their favourite newspaper, buried in small print on page 16, but they have never seen it with their own eyes. They blamed it on Congress—the unruly, disgruntled, preposterous Congress. It had never occurred to them that each and every wild Congressman was but a mouthpiece of his district, that he yelled and threatened and shook his fists because in no other way could he have transmitted the feelings of the voters. Having never studied in the University of the Highway, my former friends must now learn almost overnight what it took me fifteen years to digest : that America is not New York, Boston, Philadelphia or San Francisco, but a nation

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of villagers who refuse to be ruled by the big cities.

And the highway is singing—of the brave, grim men who are about to smile again. Of a country rescued in the nick of time. Of a future less sinful, if less glamorous, than the past.

